

三屋咲ゆう

Illustration: Okiura

学戦都市 アスタ

07. 祭華繚乱

三屋咲ゆう
illustration: okiura



学戦都市 アズダ

07. さいかりようらん
祭華繚乱



モニカ
MONICA
MONICA

パイヴィ
PÄIVI
PÄIVI

ミルセ
MILUSE
MILUSE

ルサールカ
RUSALKA
RUSALKA

トゥーリア
TUULIA
TUULIA

マフレーナ
MAHULENA
MAHULENA

「納得できませ〜ん!」
なぜ我々がこの双子とチームを
組まねばならぬのですか!

「まー、あたしは別に
構わないんだけどねー」

「ふーむ、
そう言われてものう」

Sylvia Lyneheym

シルヴィア・リュネハイム

SYLVIA LYNEHEYM





Gakusen Toshi Asterisk Volume 07

Chapter 1 - Invitation of the <Great Doctor>

“—So, what do you want to talk about?”

Courtyard of Seidoukan Academy. As soon as they arrived at the arbor, Julis cut to the chase.

In the student council room, Ayato declared that he would join Claudia’s team and on his way home after the five team members for the <Gryps> were settled — Ayato took Julis out with him as he said that there was something that he wanted to speak with her.

“As usual, you’re going right to the point, eh.”

“It’s my nature, so I can’t help it. Besides, it’s really cold outside.”

The season was exactly past the beginning of midwinter.

Although not as cold as in Lieseltania, where they were until the other day. Even so, by just standing like this one could understand that the cold was gradually permeating to the body’s core.

“In that case, shall we look for some other place?”

It wasn’t necessary to have the talk here.

“Well whatever. If you’ve expressly brought me to a place like this, it means that you don’t want others to hear our conversation, right?”

“No, it’s not that. I eventually intend to tell everyone about it. Just... Julis, I thought that I have to talk with you first.”

When Ayato said so, Julis slightly knitted her brows.

“Hmm... Well, looking at your face, I can guess that it isn’t that pleasant a talk. Let’s quickly get it over with. From tomorrow on, we’ll be busy in various ways regarding the <Gryps> after all.”

The order for the team to commence had appeared from Claudia without delay, and they were to gather in the training room tomorrow.

“Yes, I know.”

As Ayato took a short pause there, he opened his mouth facing Julis head on.

“I’ve already told you about the hospital, but there is still something about it that I haven’t told yet.”

“Something?”

The other day, Ayato received a report from Madiath and was finally able to meet with his big sister. But, it looked like his big sister cast her ability to herself and has been sleeping as is for five years. And even Yan Korbelt, the hospital director, had no means to cancel it — he already discussed this matter with everyone including Julis.

However—

“—On my way back from the hospital, I met the <Great Doctor>.”

As soon as she heard Ayato’s words, Julis opened her eyes wide and he immediately turned into a grim look.

“What did you say...?”

Anger was clearly oozing from her muffled voice.

That intensity was enough to make Ayato, who was mentally prepared to some extent, unintentionally flinch. Well, that was natural since the <Great Doctor> was the ringleader who took Julis’s close friend, Orphelia, from her. There was no way that Julis wouldn’t bear a grudge.

“.....”

But when Julis kept silent as she strongly clenched her fist and tightly ground her teeth, she shut her eyes tight for a while. Her figure held

down the violent emotion welling up and it looked like she was regulating herself.

When Julis slowly opened her eyes before long, she looked at Ayato with a piercing gaze.

“Could you tell me in details?”

To these words which finally came out as if being squeezed out from Julis’s mouth, Ayato nodded with a serious expression.

“Three days ago, when I parted from the Guard Captain Lindvall after coming out of the hospital, one woman called out to me. And she suddenly said ‘if it’s me, I can cure your big sister’.”

“!”

Julis was about to open her mouth, but Ayato continued as if interrupting her.

“Then, she — Hilda Jane Rowlands named herself and said that she was also called the <Great Doctor>.”

Ayato slightly raised his eyes and calmly began to talk about that evening.

✧

“<Great Doctor>? You?”

Ayato promptly squared off at the unexpected name.

However, that woman — Hilda who has called out to Ayato calmly nodded and smirked.

“Ah, it isn’t really like it’s me who name myself with such a proud name, so I hope you won’t misunderstand there. I may look like this, but I’m a humble one. But, since the people of Allekant went all their way to think of such a name for me, it’ll be unpleasant to flatly refuse it and become uncomfortable, right? After all if I properly show results in that area, it’ll

somehow become a very splendid circumstance in most cases no matter what I do. It's really wonderful."

It was already late at night. The hospital's reception time has passed long ago, and the lamps of streetlight dimly illuminated the dark night around. Although there was also reception for emergency conveyance, it was at the opposite side from the main gate where Ayato and the woman were.

"I want to ask one thing. Is it true that you made Orphelia Landlufen a <Strega>?"

"My, my, so you also knew that. Though that experiment hasn't yet been announced... Kishishishi, this makes things easier."

Hilda narrowed her eyes while raising a peculiar laughter.

"That's right, that's right. That was a special specimen for me. Ah, if it were still in my hands, who knows how many valuable data I'd have been able to get from it. Really, it's a shame."

As Hilda shook her head with a sad expression, she immediately pouted with a sour look this time.

"All of this is the fault of that sly raccoon of Le Wolfe. To snatch the research results that someone accomplished through hardships from the side, geez he's an awful guy, isn't he? I can't forgive him."

From how Hilda spoke, it was crystal clear that she treated Orphelia not as a human being, but strictly as a specimen for research. Morality was quite lacking there and Ayato couldn't help but frown at her selfishness.

"But well, it'll change nothing even if I lament on what already passed. As a scientist, I must always turn my eyes towards the future. —The-re-fo-re."



As Hilda suddenly brought her bust energetically towards Ayato, she revealed a complacent and uncanny smile.

“How about it, Amagiri Ayato. For both of our bright futures, would you join hands with me?”

“With you?”

If it was the usual Ayato, he would have immediately declined and left that place.

But, the face of his big sister that he met for the first time in five years floated across his mind, and did not let him do so.

“Rowlands-san, is it true that you can cure my sister?”

“Kishishishi. You can call me Hilda. And the answer to your question is, yes. If you leave it to me, I’ll splendidly awaken your Sleeping Princess.”

Hilda exaggeratedly bowed while laughing.

“How?”

“Hmm. It’ll take long to explain it, but your big sister bounded herself with her ability as a <Strega>, right? Originally to cancel this kind of ability from the outside, you must forcibly expel mana, but to that end you must first analyze the conjoined pattern between the prana and mana of an ability user. This is something like a fingerprint and differed from one ability user to another. The reason why Doctor Korbel has a hard time was because in your big sister’s case, this conjoined pattern is extremely complicated. Do you understand thus far?”

When Ayato nodded, Hilda slowly continued just as if she gave lecture to a child.

“The problem N°1 isn’t there. Even if you analyze the conjoined pattern, a special device is necessary to actually expel mana. However in your big sister’s case, prana used for the ability is so huge that it can’t be dealt with the device that is in this hospital. After all, the greater the amount

of prana conjoining is, the more the energy quantity of mana acting in concert will increase.”

“A special device?”

“It’s something called mana accelerator. Simply putting, it’s a device to control the mana movement to some extent without going through prana like <Strega> and <Dante>. By accelerating the mana, it’s possible to increase the energy state without letting the prana intervene, but — although I say that, just to be sure you don’t misunderstand, it isn’t something which can reproduce an ability — by tracing the conjoined pattern with the mana in this state, the ability can be canceled. And if one intends to cancel your big sister’s ability, a mana accelerator much larger than the one owned by this hospital will be necessary.”

Though vague, he understood the theory. But, he could not consent.

“But then, by using that large mana accelerator, even Korbelsensei can cancel the ability.”

“Chi-chi-chi.”

Then, Hilda shook her index finger, interrupting Ayato’s words.

“I’m afraid to say that Korbelsensei doesn’t have the skill to use a large mana accelerator. No, rather than Korbelsensei, I’m probably the only researcher who has used a large mana accelerator on a human body, even if you searched around the world you won’t find anyone else, kishishishi.”

After laughing for a while, Hilda said with her upturned eyes wide opened.

“Ah, if you want, I don’t mind even if you try asking directly Korbelsensei.”

“.....”

An overwhelming confidence could be felt from her words.

Which means that at least was probably true.

“—So, what do you want in return?”

“Oh?”

She has said “joining hands”, in other words Hilda should also have something that she wanted from him.

“Oh, well, well, you’re quick on the uptake. What, don’t worry. It isn’t really something difficult.”

“Wait a minute! I’ll say this just in case, but I haven’t yet decided to accept your proposal...”

To Hilda who joyfully tried to make the talk progress, Ayato tried to warn so; but he unintentionally stiffened after hearing her next words.

“—Please, win in the <Gryps>.”

Hilda’s tone was smooth, with the lightheartedness as if asking for goods in a neighboring shop.

“Win... the <Gryps>?”

“Even the next <Lindvolus> is fine, but as expected I can’t wait until the next winter. I’ve heard it; you’ll participate in your student council president’s team, right?”

“No, even so it doesn’t mean that we can win without fail...”

It would certainly be a powerful team considering the members, but the <Festa> wasn’t so sweet as to be able to win without difficulty.

“It’s all right, it’s all right. If you and that president join forces, there is no doubt you’ll win.”

Hilda nodded by herself with “yes, yes”.

“...So in other words, you want to grant your wish through me.”

“Hmm, putting it without any pretension, I guess you can say that.”

Perhaps because she was displeased with how Ayato put it, Hilda answered with a slightly non-consenting face.

“What is specifically your wish?”

“Yes, if you were to win, I’d like you to cancel my penalty.”

“...Penalty?”

“Yes. The truth is that several years ago, there was a little accident, but for some reason, I was made to take responsibility for it by myself. Well, it looks like this has slightly crossed the category of the “general cases” which I said a little while ago. As for me, I just thought one laboratory or two didn’t matter, but... anyway, with that I can’t move so freely as of now.”

Hilda said so and greatly sighed.

“The most painful thing above all is that I’m being restricted regarding the use of facilities and I’m strictly forbidden to access the level 5 of the designated facilities. I can’t advance with my research like this. And thanks to that I’ve been spending my time handling requested works to which I don’t have the least interest... Honestly, I’m fed up with it.”

Though Hilda exaggeratedly shook her head while saying so, her movement suddenly stopped on the way and she turned her upturned eyes over her glasses to Ayato.

“—Now then, the main issue is from here. In truth, in one of the designated facilities’ level 5, there is a large mana accelerator Geneva. This is a facility which my team used as a base in the past. I have it customized in various ways for my researches.”

“!”

The story was finally connected.

In other words, it would be necessary for Hilda to be able to use that facility in order to awaken his big sister. It was probably something like that.

Perhaps because she guessed from Ayato's expression, Hilda nodded while joyfully laughing.

"Kishishishi. Yes, yes, it's as you think. This is the so-called give-and-take, a fair term of trade. If you cancel my penalty, I'll be able to use the mana accelerator and resume my research at the same time. Like that, I'll be able to awaken your big sister. It's a really simple and beautiful logic."

Though Hilda joyfully shrugged her shoulders, of course Ayato was not so foolish as to just accept it.

"—Before that, could you tell me about what your research is based on?"

"Hmm?"

As these words were unexpected, Hilda blinked her eyes over her glasses with surprise.

"Well it's fine, I guess. Simply put, my research is about creating a <Starpulse Generation> posteriori."

Hilda plainly said that, but the subject was so outrageous that he could treat the topic as preposterous. Until now between <Starpulse Generation> and ordinary humans, there was such a difference that it could be called isolation from the existence of prana, the strength of their build and muscle tissues to their blood composition, in every part.

For example, it'd be better if it was only a research which raised the probability of a child, who will be born, to become a <Starpulse Generation>, but — naturally even if there was an ethical problem with that — one might say that restructuring the body of a human posteriori was akin to people playing God.

Normally, Ayato too would have probably thought that it was only a dreamlike story.

—But, Ayato already knew Orphelia's case.

"But, shouldn't your research already be a success...?"

"Ah, you're talking about Orphelia Landlufen, right?"

Then, Hilda nodded with a complicated expression.

"Certainly that was the fewer research results that I made up. After all, I cleared the stage of making an ordinary human a <Starpulse Generation> and I succeeded in changing her to a <Strega> — and moreover a <Strega> with a power strong that has never been seen in history, in one go."

However contrary to the contents of her speech, Hilda's expression was somewhat dark.

"However... Honestly speaking, that's a certain kind of irregular even for me."

"Irregular?"

"From my long time research, I built a perfect theory and put it into application. Then, a <Strega> which could be called "ultimate" was born. There is no doubt about it. And yet, even when I conducted experiments in the same exact conditions afterwards, I couldn't reproduce it."

(In other words, Orphelia is the only success example, huh...)

As Ayato understood it, Hilda weakly dropped her shoulders.

"There is no meaning in a result which can't be reproduced. We and this world have no room to accept something that we can't control."

"Something that we can't control...?"

When Ayato asked, Hilda raised her head who was hanging down.

"Oh, haven't you noticed?"

And she continued with a complacent and sarcastic smile.

“Among ability users such as <Strega> and <Dante>, there are people with unusual and beneficial power. People with ability which can contribute in more various fields rather than using it for battles. But, the Integrated Enterprise Foundation, which currently reigns over the world, doesn’t approve it. Why is it? Well, it’s simple. It’s because their abilities are individualistic dispositions in the end; their instability is extremely influenced by intentions, and moreover it will be lost without any choice before long. If such a thing were to go wrong and gets into the society as an important gear, it’ll be a great problem, right?”

“...Do you say that the Integrated Enterprise Foundation doesn’t trust the <Strega> and <Dante>?”

“More exactly, they don’t trust the <Starpulse Generation>. After all, not a single <Starpulse Generation> has ever had his name entered at the top echelons of the Integrated Enterprise Foundation.”

Even Ayato knew well in what kind of position/situation the <Starpulse Generation> were in the present world.

But when he was once again made to realize it like this, he couldn’t hold the fuzzy feeling welling in his chest.

That wasn’t probably unrelated to the fact that Ayato visited Lieseltania the other day, too.

“This is also the same for ogre luxes — or rather Ulm mana dites. For example regarding <Gravi-Sheath>, which you also know well, even the most advanced Meteoric Engineering can only partially implement its gravity control. But, those which can draw out power like that are limited, replication isn’t also possible and moreover to something with a risk of rampaging, the Integrated Enterprise Foundation can’t show permission above a certain level. Therefore, things which they have finished taking data as research materials are lent to each academy under their management as toys called ogre lux.”

As Hilda cut her words once there, she slowly opened both her hands.

“In order to accept the <Starpulse Generation> in this world, it’s indispensable that all about them is elucidated, that every concern is gotten rid of and that able to keep them in check is admitted. And my research may become a great step to that, right?”

“...Do you say that it’s your goal?”

“Yes, that’s right. —Oops, not good, not good. I’ve strayed again from the topic. So, could you already tell me your answer?”

After pondering a little, Ayato looked straight into the eyes of Hilda who shook unsteadily.

“—I refuse.”

“Hou. Can you tell me why?”

When Ayato said so, Hilda looked back at Ayato with a surprised face.

Honestly speaking for Ayato, there was no more attractive than Hilda’s proposition.

Now that he reunited with his big sister and witnessed her figure which continued sleeping, he thought that he wanted to make her wake up no matter what he risked. There were many things that he wanted to talk with his big sister, he wanted to hear her voice again and above all, he wanted to see her smiling face.

But — for that, he couldn’t afford to let a tragedy such as that of Julis and Orphelia repeat. Not only wouldn’t he be able to face Julis, but he wouldn’t also be able to find an excuse to say to his big sister who would wake up.

As far as he heard the situation, the current Hilda was in a state where she was bound with so-called chains — if so, Ayato couldn’t afford to release it.

“Bluntly put, I can’t trust you.”

“...I see. It’s a shame.”

Perhaps because Hilda was really thinking so from the bottom of her heart, she weakly dropped her shoulders.

"I got it. Well then, I'll leave it at this for today. However..."

But when she once took a pause there as she put on airs, Hilda looked at Ayato with a serious face.

"I predict this, Amagiri Ayato. The time when you'll eventually take my hand will definitely come. Right, definitely."

"....."

Ayato stared straight at her silently as is.

"Well then, I hope to see you again. Kishishishi."

As Hilda said so and fluttered her white robe, she disappeared into the darkness of midnight leaving laughter like rustling of clothes.

✧

"—I see."

When Ayato finished talking, Julis deeply sighed after briefly saying so. Before they knew, the world began to be dyed red and the trees which were illuminated by the setting sun depicted deep shadow on the ground.

"I understand the circumstances. But, are you really fine with that?"

"Eh?"

When Ayato asked back to the unexpected words, Julis indifferently continued.

"Of course, I can't forgive the <Great Doctor>. But, that's to the bitter end my personal feelings. I also bear in mind how we must respect the fact that we can't afford to have victims like Orphelia appear anymore than this, but that's just righteous indignation after all."

“But, that’s...”

“No, I understand. Um, I’m honestly happy that you have refused the deal with that woman. But... at the same time, I feel guilty about it. Because of me, it looks like you can’t move freely.”

While Julis revealed an unusually timid wry smile, she cast down her eyes.

“In the end, even my wish is just a greater extension of my self-satisfaction. If you really want to awaken your big sister, I won’t blame you no matter what you choose to do. Keep at least that in mind.”

“Julis...”

He didn’t think that such words would possibly come out from Julis’s mouth.

He couldn’t help but inwardly feel warm.

“Thank you. But, it’s fine. I understood when I met her. That the <Great Doctor> isn’t a person that I can trust.”

They exchanged a conversation for a short time, but the horror, which he caught a glimpse of, was something that Ayato has never experienced so far.

“But, the fact that the <Great Doctor> can awaken your big sister probably isn’t a lie.”

“...Yes, I also think that.”

Certainly, Hilda wasn’t someone who could be trusted, but she wasn’t the type of person to tell a shallow lie, either. Speaking on that point, she was slightly similar to Le Wolfe Black Institute Student Council President Dirk Eberwein.

Speaking about what they differed; you might say that Hilda gave off a dangerous impression which Dirk didn’t have.

“I also confirmed it with Korbel-sensei since then. Theoretically, it certainly seemed to be possible to awaken my big sister with the method that the <Great Doctor> said. And it’s also true that only the <Great Doctor> can do it... The Doctor also seemed very mortified.”

As a result, it meant that there were no lies in the conditions that Hilda had presented.

But even so, there was no telling that there was no other method than that.

“I’ll try to find a method to awaken my big sister without relying on the <Great Doctor>. For that too, I must win the <Gryps>.”

Even if it was impossible with only Ayato’s power, it should be possible if he borrowed the Integrated Enterprise Foundation’s power. It wasn’t also as if he could completely trust the Integrated Enterprise Foundation, but still they were better than Hilda.

“I see... That’s why that enthusiasm, huh.”

As she remembered about how Ayato said “let’s win without fail” a little while ago in the student council room, Julis nodded as she understood his passion.

“I understand. At any rate, I also think of nothing other than victory. —Then, we must do our best again from tomorrow on.”

“Yes, you’re right.”

Though he himself actually couldn’t sort things out about Hilda, by confiding to Julis like this he was finally able to have confidence towards his choice.

Now, he only had to move forward without hesitation.



The next day, Claudia’s exclusive training room.

“Now then, we will appear to the <Gryps> with these members, but... in the meantime, we must first decide about the most important thing.”

Claudia looked around at the team members — Ayato, Julis, Saya and Kirin that she gathered and said so.

“The most important thing?”

To Saya which cocked her head in puzzlement, Claudia nodded with a serious face.

“In other words, the team name.”

At that moment, Julis who bent herself forward lost her balance.

“How is it important?! Such a thing doesn’t matter!”

“My, but we will be introduced with that name to the whole world, you know? We cannot afford to register with a weird name, right?”

“That’s right, but... there are also many more important things, right?”

It looked like Julis couldn’t consent, but Kirin who was at her side timidly raised her hands.

“Um... for reference, what kind of names are other teams participating with?”

“Let me see. I would say the most famous are the Silver Wings Knights of Garrardsworth after all. They are divided into team Lancelot composed from the rank #1 to rank #5, and team Tristan composed from the rank #6 to rank #10. Beside them, team Rusalka of Queen Veil is, as you all know, using their band name as is.”



Rusalka was a Girls Rock Band which boasted of a global popularity. Although not to the extent of Sylvia, they boasted of a high popularity rate among the young generation and they also had many enthusiastic fans. Ayato has also heard about that name and several of their tunes.

“By the way, what will happen if the team name is non-registered?”

“In that case, the name of the representative will become the team name. For example, if the representative is called Tanaka-san, it’ll be team Tanaka.”

“Then, it’s already fine, isn’t it?”

Julis casually remarked as she was not interested at all.

“My, did you like the name “Team Tanaka” that much?”

“That’s not it! I mean that since you’re this team’s representative, “team Enfield” is fine!”

As Julis raised her eyes, Claudia turned to the other members while ficklely laughing.

“If the others are fine with it, then I don’t mind, but... No, before that, we should talk in the first place about whether it is fine for me to be the representative.”

“It’s Claudia who chose the member this time, so I think it’s fine that you’re.”

“...Me, too.”

“I-I also think that it’s fine.”

Saya and Kirin respectively agreed with Ayato’s words, and though with a sour look as is, Julis also nodded.

“I understand. In that case, though presumptuous I shall take the position of representative.”

Claudia bowed her head as she said that.

“Ah, speaking of representative, will President announce her candidacy for the student council president next year, too?”

“I intend to do so, but... what’s the matter, Toudou-san? Are you interested to the student council’s work?”

Kirin buzzingly shook her head.

“D-Don’t be absurd! Someone like me isn’t cut for it...! Um, it’s just that I was wondering whether your role of representative wouldn’t become a burden with your work as President, so I was a little...”

Because Claudia was usually busy one way or another, Kirin was worried about that.

“Fufufu, you don’t have to worry. After all, I do it because I like the student council.”

“Well, I don’t think that there is someone more cut out for it than you in this academy. It’s to the extent that I doubt whether a rival candidate will appear for the election.”

“...Certainly.”

To Julis’s words, Saya nodded and Ayato also agreed.

Claudia was a talented woman of versatile type that could handle anything, and her achievements as student council president were recognized by every student of Seidoukan.

“—By the way, I would like to hear the continuance of yesterday’s talk.”

“Which talk are you talking about?”

“It’s about your wish which might make us enemy out of Galaxy.”

To Julis’s words, all the gazes were turned to Claudia.

Since that matter has been left unsettled in the end, Ayato was also concerned about it.

“Well... However, it’s not that interesting a talk, you know?”

Claudia said so, took a breath and slowly began the talk.

“My wish is to hear a story from a certain person who is currently detained.”

“...Hear a story? That’s it?”

As Julis asked with a disappointed face, Claudia revealed a light smile.

“Yes. But, that task is difficult. After all, the other party is a person related to the <Dusk of Jade>— more exactly, the one regarded as the ideological leader of that criminal group.”

“!”

You could see that everyone suddenly gasped.

Speaking of the <Dusk of Jade>, it was the greatest terrorist incident in Asterisk history. But presently, that topic was considered taboo and regarding the truth too, many parts were still shrouded in darkness.

“The judgment related to the <Dusk of Jade> has been held in a special courtroom by the Integrated Enterprise Foundation leadership and most of it was private... Moreover, there is also the fact that the judgment itself was not opened to the public and was frozen from within; in that case it looks like it’s also the one that I’m hoping to meet.”

“Errr, even if I ask you about that person’s name...?”

“I don’t mind, I don’t think you people know him. His name is Ladislav Bartok.”

Kirin who asked that and Julis beside her made faces showing that it was their first time hearing that name. Naturally, Ayato too was not familiar with it.

But to everyone's surprise, Saya slowly raised her hand.

"...I know him."

"Ah, that's right. It won't be strange even if Sasamiya-san know that name."

"Oh. Who on earth is he?"

"He is a famous scientist in the development research regarding luxes and ogre luxes. Especially, he has written several important theses related to ogre luxes and you may say that they are at a level where his name remains in history. But, I've read in some sort of book that he went missing after a certain time. If I remember correctly, before that he has assumed the profession of teacher in Seidoukan..."

When Julis asked, Saya began to talk in a garrulous tone, but she closed her mouth midway as she was taken aback.

"Right. At one time, he has assumed the position of teacher in the University department of this Seidoukan. Although, it seemed that he has hardly taken charge of a class and mostly secluded himself in a laboratory of Galaxy. And the ogre lux created by his hands in those days is this <Pan-Dora>."

Claudia took out the activation body of <Pan-Dora> from the holder on her waist as she said so.

"Heeh, so he is the one who made <Pan-Dora>."

Though Kirin seemed to admire honestly, Julis beside her looked like she was brooding over something with a serious expression.

"No, more importantly... if what you said just now is true, it meant that the ideological leader of the people who caused the <Dusk of Jade> has been in Seidoukan..."

"...That's scandalous."

“Ah...! Y-You’re right. Then, is it the reason why President is targeted by Galaxy...?”

“Fufufu, it’s likely.”

Though Claudia laughed as to evade the question, Julis stepped forward even further as if to say that it was inexcusable.

“So, what do you want to talk about with that man when you meet him?”

“I cannot tell you that yet. Because if I tell you any more than this, there is a high possibility that danger will directly befall on you guys. After all as of now, all contact with him is prohibited.”

But, Claudia calmly, yet flatly rejected it.

“But, as I also said the other day, it’s the time when Galaxy is still observing my movement now. They probably won’t make any big movements until at least the summer.”

“.....”

On the other hand, Ayato somewhat felt that he was not fully satisfied with what she said.

Certainly, that talk was something which touched the dark side of Seidoukan and Galaxy, and depending on the situation, it would become quite a scandal. But even if it was so, the <Dusk of Jade> itself was already a story of the past. Even if that was to be made public now, would it be to the extent that Galaxy would move directly?

(Besides it looked like Claudia hasn’t yet talked about everything, too...)

—There was probably something deeper in this matter.

Although vague, Ayato felt it.

“Now then, let’s leave the digression as this and get to the main issue already.”

“The main issue?”

“Yes. It is said that the <Gryps> is the <Festa> with the most unexpected results and surprises. In other words, it’s possible to overturn the difference in ability depending on tactics — therefore, we must accurately grasp each other’s ability.”

As she said so, Claudia activated <Pan-Dora> which she was holding in her hand.

“—Having said that, it is necessary to have you guys know about this child’s true ability.”

Chapter 2 – Shining Type Long-Range Induction Armament (Rectoluz)

“<Pan-Dora>’s true ability, you say...?”

One could see that all the members present swallowed their saliva.

The ability of the twin swords, ocre lux <Pan-Dora>, that Claudia used was foresight.

But, it was not known how much power it actually concealed — for example, specifically how many seconds ahead could it foresee. That was also because Claudia was the first person to be decently able to handle <Pan-Dora>.

Though of course the development staff would know, since the development research of ocre luxes was a highly confidential domain even inside the Integrated Enterprise Foundation, it was very improbable that it would leak out from there.

In the end, there was only rumor going around about <Pan-Dora> and its ability was still a mystery even now.

“First, I will tell you about the fact. <Pan-Dora>’s ability is foresight, in other words there is no mistaking it that it can see the future. And currently, what I can foresee is — about 300 seconds ahead I would say.”

“!?”

“T-Three hundred seconds!?”

Everyone could not help becoming speechless.

It was no wonder since 300 seconds meant that she could predict until 5 minutes ahead in the future. Though it might not simply compare with the <Phoenix>, among the matches of Ayato and Julis, there was one which was over without lasting even 5 minutes. It meant that Claudia was able to predict everything from the beginning of that match to the end.

Normally thinking, one could no longer lose.

“However... even if I say so, the number 300 seconds is to the bitter end only a stock.”

“Stock...?”

Kirin wonderingly tilted her head to the side.

In contrast with it, Julis nodded with a startled face.

“I see, so that’s it...”

“As expected of a <Strega>, you’re quick to catch this kind of thing.”

As Claudia smiled, Julis too continued while returning a sarcastic smile.

“In other words, <Pan-Dora>’s future foresight wears out, right?”

“Correct answer.”

Claudia applauded pleasantly.

After hearing it, Ayato finally understood.

“Then... This meant, for example, that if Claudia was to read 10 seconds ahead in the future from now, the remaining time (of prediction) will be 290 seconds?”

“Yes, that’s exactly it.”

“So, it isn’t like it can be used infinitely...”

“Which reminds, you said the other day, didn’t you? That <Pan-Dora> has a weakness. Were you speaking about this?”

Julis was probably talking about the time on the way to Lieseltania, when Claudia invited Ayato and them in her team.

“Yes. When I use up this stock, this child becomes mere twin swords. Also, so that that doesn’t happen, I have worked out a plan to be able to preserve the stock as much as possible. For example, my first duel is the best strategic arrangement for it.”

“When you say your first duel, are you speaking about that one of the middle school section times?”

“If I’m not mistaken, your opponent was the rank #20, right?”

Julis and Kirin immediately returned so.

“Is it that famous a duel?”

Claudia’s middle school section times meant that Kirin and of course Julis too should have not yet come in this Asterisk.

“She already had very few matches, but that one is probably the most famous among them. People who try to challenge her, after having first seen that match video — most of them had their hearts broken.”

Julis answered in a somewhat unamused tone. Perhaps she might have been one of those people.

“U-Um, I have the data about it.”

When Kirin operated her portable terminal as she said so, the match video was projected to the space window.

Standing on the stage was certainly Claudia, although her features were more childish than now.

Confronting Claudia was a man fairly older than her; he was probably around 20. He was holding a small one hand sword type lux in his right hand and a handgun type lux in his left hand.

“Heeh, a dual wielding style with a sword and a gun, huh.”

It was a quite offensive style.

“In those days, this kind of offense overemphasizing strategy was popular after all. He was quite a skillful user, too.”

“...It just sounds like pride when we already know the result.”

Julis muttered as she was amazed.

Meanwhile, the school badges announced the beginning of the match and the man shot a light bullet towards Claudia so as to check her.

Claudia easily avoided it with only a slight movement—

“Wait a minute. Don’t tell me here, Claudia... she has her eyes closed?”

Ayato muttered in astonishment.

He did not see it wrong. Claudia, not even having set up <Pan-Dora>, just loosely slouched and she clearly had her eyes closed.

It seemed like the gallery in the screen has also noticed it. You could perceive that a strange commotion spread in the audience and on the

other hand, that the face of Claudia's opponent was dyed in anger. Though it was a natural reaction, he probably thought that he was taken lightly.

When the man shortened the distance at a stretch, he swung his small sword to slash sideways.

Claudia, with her eyes still closed, dodged it with a back step and then avoided the light bullet, which the man shot in his pursuit, by only twisting the upper half of her body.

At that moment, the gallery got excited as if exploding.

Though the man unleashed consecutive attacks as he became irritated, he could not even graze Claudia's body.

It wasn't that the man was weak. As Claudia said a little while ago, he was a very skilled user which skillfully managed the sword and gun. Though there was no weight in one blow, the number of blows in middle-range battle and the power control were considerable.

However — no matter how many fierce attacks the man set, Claudia, with a cool face as is, easily dodged them as if dancing.

"...It'll be over soon. Watch carefully."

Before long towards Claudia who dodged an attack as she greatly jumped in the air, the man, thinking that it was a good opportunity, rapidly shot successive light bullets. Naturally, evasion in mid-air is extremely difficult.

But.

While rotating her body in mid-air, Claudia swung her twin swords for the first time in this match.

The next moment, the light bullets were all lopped off and scattered.

Claudia who landed as is slightly stepped towards the dumbfounded man and accurately bisected only his school badge as she went past him.

The mechanical sound announcing the conclusion resounded in the site which fell silent.

After finishing hearing it, Claudia slowly opened her eyes and gracefully bowed with her usually calm smile.

“...That sure is crazy.”

“Right?”

“Well, since this was a performance for the sake of having one believe so.”

Claudia put her hand on her thin smiling lips as she calmly said so.

“Perhaps is this match the source of the rumor that Claudia can foresee dozens of seconds ahead?”

In fact, there was no doubt that it was an impossible feat unless one had foresight ability.

And after this display, there were certainly not many people brave enough to challenge Claudia.

“Yes. In this match, I used a fair amount of stock that I had saved up; but thanks to that I had the wanted results. After all afterwards, even when I remained as rank #2, there were hardly people who dared challenge me.”

The more she used the time of foresight with <Pan-Dora>, the more it decreased.

If so, then it'd be better that the opportunities to use it were as few as possible.

If this match was a performance for that, then it was indeed well thought.

—At the same time, it reminded of another condition regarding <Pan-Dora>'s ability.

“...I’ve a question.”

There, Saya slightly raised her hand.

“...If you choose such a plan, then does the foresight time’s stock restore (recover) perhaps?”

It seemed like Saya thought also the same thing as Ayato.

If <Pan-Dora> had a fixed amount of foresight time from the beginning and if it was the end when it was consumed until the remaining quality fell to zero, then there would be no meaning of this strategy of Claudia.

“I see, that’s a very good question. The answer is... Yes. Even with me doing nothing, this stock will increase with time as long as I make a contract with<Pan-Dora>.”

So that was it after all.

By first investing it to some extent and then through that, by decreasing the chances of battling, it would make storing up the stock easier. That was probably Claudia’s aim.

And that splendidly succeeded.

(But, in that case...)

“Um, how long does it take to recover?”

“Roughly speaking, about three days are necessary to stock one second.”

“One second in three days, huh... You can’t indeed waste it.”

Though Julis muttered so with a difficult face, Ayato realized something entirely different.

“—‘The worst personality’, huh”

“Hmm?”

With a dubious face, Julis turned at Ayato’s mutter.

“What are you talking about, Ayato?”

“Ah, no... The truth is, I have heard about <Pan-Dora>’s prize from Claudia before. She said — ‘the user personally experiences their own death, which will come someday, within their dream’.”

Julis and the other two girls’ expressions changed at the words of Ayato.

“T-That’s too cruel no matter how you look at it...”

Though Kirin held her mouth and looked at Claudia with a face likely to cry any moment, the very Claudia only nodded with a smile.

But, that was not the most repulsive part about <Pan-Dora>.

Able to use its ability for one second in three days meant that it was necessary to be together with this ogre lux for that much time in order to manage it. In other words, one could only draw out its ability by personally experiencing one’s own death nightly and keeping enduring the long suffering.

Claudia has said that she evaluated <Pan-Dora> as having the worst personality before, but you could certainly agree with this.

“In other words, it’s necessary to pay a great prize for a powerful ability... No but, at any rate...”

“...It seems painful.”

Julis and Saya too spoke with sad expressions.

“Fufufu, don’t worry. It’s not that severe a prize as you are worried about. Besides... if I, its user, have to say, this child’s ability is not that absolute, either.”

Claudia said so with an indifferent face.

“As I also said before, although called future foresight, it’s not like it’s omnipotent and invincible. Let me explain it... Ayato, may I have you take a battle stance for a little bit?”

“Eh? Ah, yes. It’s fine, but...”

Ayato urged by Claudia released his seal, activated<Ser-Versta> and set it up aiming at the eyes.

“—Now, then.”

The moment when Claudia said that and grinned—

“!”

The body of Ayato who felt a slight chill partly moved reflexively and he exerted <Ser-Versta> to the left.

Its sword blade stopped the blow, which Claudia has suddenly launched, at the very limit.

“...That’s sudden, Claudia.”

When Ayato said so with a wry smile, Claudia quickly pulled back her sword and shrugged her shoulders.

“As expected, it doesn’t work on Ayato.”

From the strength of the power put into it, he could understand that it was a blow without intention to hit.

“Now then, the attack just now has, as you saw, splendidly been blocked by Ayato. If I had used <Pan-Dora>’s foresight one second before the attack— well strictly speaking, even 0,5 second is enough only to confirm the success or failure of one attack, but I will rather go with one second in order to explain it comprehensibly — I would have been able to foresee that scene just now.”

As Claudia said up to there, she returned <Pan-Dora> to his activation body and put it in the holder.

“In that case, let’s think about how I should have gone for the next move. For example, because that just now was an attack from the right, let’s assume that I changed it to a blow from the left. Right, <Pan-Dora>’s

foresight is absolute, but there isn't one future. If I change my action, the future will again change at that instant, too. So, we can express in other words that <Pan-Dora>'s ability is 'an ability that can repeat trial and error with no risk of failure'."

"The future changes..."

Ayato muttered so for no particular reason.

That was something obvious, but for some reason he resounded in his chest.

"Now then, I used one second stock and foresaw the result of the attack from the left, but it was similarly blocked. It can't be helped, so let's try foreseeing an attack from an overhead position and an attack from a low position. With this, it makes that I consume a stock of a total of four seconds, but even so I couldn't still foresee a future where my attack succeeds. —That's natural, because in a situation where we confronted each other head on like now, it'll be almost impossible if it considers the ability difference that I launch an attack to Ayato."

"N-No, I think that Claudia's attack was scathing enough, but..."

As he followed so, Claudia exaggeratedly shook her head.

"No. Of course, I myself am confident about my skill in close range combat. But when compared to Ayato and Toudou-san, I cannot deny that I am one step behind."

"....."

Kirin lowered her eyebrows as she was troubled, but seeing how she said nothing, she was probably of the same opinion. Frankly speaking, Ayato certainly felt the same way, too.

"But, it does not mean that I am in a deadlock with this, either. For example, among the attacks of up, down, left and right that I tried just now, let's say that Ayato's defense was just a little late regarding the attack from the low position compared with the others. So, let's say that

I change the trajectory of my attack in response to the movement that Ayato used to defend against the attack from the low position... First, I will foresee that the attack that changed the trajectory clockwise... Ah but, it's a shame. Even so, Ayato's reaction is splendid and in the end it is parried. Then, how about changing the trajectory counterclockwise? Yes, it is likewise parried, but in this side it looks like it's possible to slightly break Ayato's stance. Then this time, I use here as a reference... You already understand, right? I consumed six seconds up to here, but if I put this much into just one attack, the stock wouldn't be enough no matter how much there is."

As Claudia cut off there, she sighed while saying "good grief".

"...In other words, doesn't it work against higher ranked opponents?"

"It's not like it doesn't work, but at least in terms of attack, it's certain that it's inefficient. If there is an exception, it would be the counter, I guess. Since in this case, it becomes a situation where the opponent's actions are considerably restricted, it's very likely to work even against higher ranked opponents. But, if the opponent has knowledge about my foresight ability and is cautious of counters, it will become difficult. Besides above all, there is no means to deal with projectile weapons and long range attacks."

Claudia replied with a wry smile to Saya's outspoken question.

"That said, even I don't deny the fact that the ability of future foresight is powerful. As you understood when you have watched the match video recording a little while ago, this ability displays a tremendous effect about defense in particular. After all, no matter what kind of attack the opponent set, you will know."

"Certainly in this case, even if the opponent is a higher rank, there will be no problem."

"Yes. But of course, there are exceptions. I can't deal with wide area attacks like the <Venomous Witch>'s ability with foresight immediately before, and it also has bad affinity with consecutive attacks like Toudou-

san's "Conjoined Cranes". After all, the stock will steadily decrease. Besides, I cannot evade an attack at a speed beyond my physical ability even if I see it coming. They are the so-called limits."

They also remembered that there was a topic before about which one between Claudia and Kirin is the stronger.

They mutually compromised then and did not reach a conclusion, but now they understood after hearing this talk. In fact, if it was only battle techniques, as she said a while ago Kirin would be above; but since there was <Pan-Dora>'s ability, Kirin's attacks would not be successful very often. How much stock Claudia would spend at that battle... depending on that, there was no doubt that the outcome would vary.

"With this, I have told you everything about <Pan-Dora>'s ability. And I think that you can now understand why I am fixated not on the <Lindvolus> which is an individual match, but rather on the <Gryps> which is a team battle."

Julis nodded at her words.

"With <Pan-Dora>'s ability at your disposition, a one-on-one tournament battle is out of question. After all, if you were to face a higher rank on the way, even if you win, you might have used up the stock there. But, when it comes to team battle, there will be no need to face a higher rank by yourself. And above all — if you yourself are the team leader, the possibility of defeat will become extremely low, huh."

"That's right. In team battle when the leader's school badge is destroyed, that team's defeat is decided even if all the other members have not yet been defeated. Conversely speaking, if you defeat only the team leader, a great reversal is possible. The reason why there are many unexpected results in the <Gryps> lies precisely on this fact."

"...Then, everyone will concentrate and aim at the leader?"

Claudia grinned and answered Saya's artless question.

“That depends on each team’s strategy. Certainly it is effective to set a swift attack match aiming for the leader with many persons, but creating a numerical advantage by crushing each one using that opportunity is again another mean, too... Ah, by the way because team leader and team representative are different, it is also possible to change the leader in every match with the current regulations. It is also a strategy to choose an appropriate leader depending on the opposing team.”

“...Hmm. Although it may be certain that your ability is effective for defense, but I hear that it’s the current main stream that the person in charge of logistical (rear) support acts as leader.”

“Well, the risk is big for the vanguard no matter what after all. —Well, let’s set that aside.”

Claudia stopped the conversation there and turned her gaze to Ayato.

“It is not only of my <Pan-Dora> that we must accurately grasp the ability.”

“Eh...?”

“Ayato, we must also know in detail about your <Ser-Versta>. Although I said that, <Ser-Versta> that you use is too unstable.”

“Ah... well... I guess...”

When being jabbed there, Ayato ached.

As he was aware that he hasn’t yet mastered <Ser-Versta>, he could not deny it.

“First, the power to burn down <Gravi-Sheath>’s ability itself which you showed in the battle against the <Violent Vampire Princess>. It would be a great if you could freely manipulate that, but...”

“Even I don’t really know how I did it after all.”

<Ser-Versta> could burn down all creation. <Strega>’s, <Dante>’s or an ogre lux’s ability were not exception to that.

But, it could only deal with attacks which materialized and like at the time of <Gravi-Sheath>, it was common for it to do something like cutting the ability of gravity control itself. It would be delicate if Ayato were asked whether he could do it again.

“At that time, I was absorbed in the battle, or rather it looked like <Ser-Versta> has lent me its power.”

“Hmm... It looks like that child is quite whimsical.”

“Basically, I feel like I’m constantly tested.”

Ayato shrugged his shoulders as he said that.

In the first place, although he was able to activate it even in his sealed state at the very first time, judging from how he became unable to activate it unless in a full powered state from the second time onwards, he could not deny the feeling that the hurdle was being steadily raised. Even though it was at this late hour, it seemed like he went through training from Sparta with the thought “since I was able to do it from that time up until now, I can probably do it this time, too”.

“Even the size optimization that you showed in the <Phoenix> finals, you can’t still do it without Julis’s cooperation, right?”

“Ugh...”

“Looks like it. This guy seems to be quite bad at small adjustment of prana.”

Julis replied in Ayato’s stead.

In fact, Ayato has tried it countless times since then, but in the end he has never once succeeded again by himself.

“If Julis is to act as agent for adjustment, there will be many openings in a team battle and we would hardly be able to incorporate it into tactics. At least regarding this, I want Ayato to be able to do it alone.”

“...I’ll do my best”

When Ayato replied so, Claudia contentedly smiled and clapped her hands.

“Now then, there is no meaning if we only discuss. Ayato has also taken the trouble to release his seal, let’s begin training for team battle.”

✧

At the center of the training room, Ayato and company were divided into two sets and were facing each other.

“Well then, since I am the only one among us that has experience with team battle, I will explain it simply. The <Gryps> is a team battle by five persons, but a team where all the five persons can take a perfect coordination is extremely rare. Naturally time is required to train, but that is not necessarily effective — ah, only Garrardsworth’s teams are exception. After all, that place is an academy laying emphasis on group battle.”

Claudia who stood in front of Ayato once again activated <Pan-Dora> and set it up with both hands. On the other side, Kirin who drew out Senbakiri stood next to Ayato listening carefully to Claudia’s talk.

“Well, people who can change a situation all by themselves with the ability of <Strega>, <Dante>— or an ogre lux are not few.”

To the words of Julis who has folded her arms on her side, Claudia nodded.

Certainly in case that one had to deal with an ability which had a wide range effect, individual action would become more important than moving in group.

“Yes. Even so, there are also not so many cases where the five team members will disperse and it will turn into a melee. Because in case one stood alone, he will be aimed at first. The vanguard fighting while fluidly combining a two-man cell or tree-man cell depending on the strategy and situation, and the rear guard covering them is the most

typical strategy in the <Gryps>, right? And for that, nothing will begin if we do not first do individual coordination.”

“...In other words, the <Gryps> is the extension system of the <Phoenix>?”

Only Saya who stood in a slightly distant place looked somewhat bored.

“Yes, that’s right. We will first determine which member each of us will function together with as a tag team for a basis, and then as an extension of it we will set up a coordination pattern of no less than three people. Of course, we will narrow down the person in charge and situate them with the coordination pattern, and there is also the method of shortening the training time, but...”

“No, I think that if we do that, the risk in case of emergency will be high.”

Ayato also agreed with Kirin’s words.

It would be more preferable if they could deal with it extensively even if it took time.

“Then, at least in this year... let’s firmly endeavor in the individual coordination strengthening for another three months. Afterwards, I intend to start a full-scale team battle practice after observing the situation. With that said——”

Claudia lightly laughed and one could feel that she was kneading prana inside her body.

“I already want to begin the mock battle, but are you ready?”

The grouping of mock battle that would be held by Claudia’s suggestion was Ayato/Kirin tag versus Claudia/Julis tag. Ayato has already taken sufficient coordination with Julis and Saya, and since it was also the same with Saya and Kirin, while considering all that —— it has been decided that Saya who eventually lost in rock-paper-scissors would be left out for the time being.

"I will count on you, Kirin-chan!"

"Y-Yes! Likewise!"

Kirin answered with a slightly nervous voice.

That was probably due to the fact that not only was this her first time to form a tag team with Ayato, but also the fact that she was the team leader.

In this mock battle, they have set the leaders assuming the <Gryps>. Kirin was the leader of her tag and Claudia, the leader of the tag Claudia/Julis.

"Fufufu... let's do our best, Julis."

"You don't need to tell me that. More importantly, this is a rare opportunity. So I will use that."

"Of course. It looks like we will be able to record some great combat data today."

As they were probably setting up a strategy, Julis and Claudia were whisperingly discussing about something in low voices; but as they nodded at each other before long, Julis took a step back.

"Team A vs. Team B, Practice Match Start!"

Probably because they left the team names as default settings since it was a mock battle, the mechanical sound subtly announced a flat start signal.

As Ayato exchanged a significant look with Kirin, both of them stood side by side and shortened the distance to Claudia at stretch.

Since the leader Claudia was the vanguard, it was probably common sense to aim for a swift attack match ignoring Julis.

"Haaa!"

“Taaa—!”

Ayato and Kirin slashed at Claudia almost with the same timing with Ayato slashing from the left and Kirin from the right.

“My, my...!”

Although Claudia stopped them with <Pan-Dora> set up in both her hands, her expression became stiff. Kirin’s slash aside, it should be fairly harsh to stop Ayato’s attack with one hand.

Moreover, Ayato’s weapon was <Ser-Versta>. Although fellow ogre luxes, one could understand that <Ser-Versta> gradually pushed <Pan-Dora>’s light blade.

“As expected this is... harsh!”

As Claudia suddenly relaxed, she warded off Ayato’s attack as she twisted her body.

But at that chance, Kirin moved to her next attack as she following the flow.

“Kuh...!”

Claudia barely repelled it, but her stance was completely broken. Just before Ayato was going to mow down the school badge on her chest—

“—!”

Suddenly feeling bloodlust from right above, Ayato greatly leapt back once. Immediately after, three blades of light which nose-dived from up in the air pierced the place where Ayato was standing until a little while ago.

“A-Ayato-senpai! That’s...!”

When looking, Kirin similarly dodged and opened wide her eyes in surprise.

“Phew... you’re late, Julis. No matter how you put it, it’s impossible to deal with Ayato and Toudou-san without the future foresight. I can’t also possibly afford to waste it on a mock battle and I was on the verge of losing without even holding ten seconds.”

“Sorry. I haven’t yet been able to perfectly control all the six of them.”

As Julis said so, the blades of light which stuck in the ground softly floated in the air.

They thought at first that it was Julis’s ability, but upon closer inspection, that wasn’t it.

“Is this perhaps, Aspera Spina...?”

It looked just like the thin sword type lux which Julis used before. But, three blades — no, if combining with the ones which attacked Kirin, a total of six blades flew in the air as if being manipulated with invisible threads and then stopped exactly as they surrounded Julis.

“No, you’re wrong Ayato. This is Nova Spina— my new sword.”

As Julis fearlessly smiled, she waved the seventh thin sword type lux which she held in her hand.

“Is this the said new type lux?”

Then, Saya who has been silently watching until then asked as she unusually had a keen interest in it.

“Yes. This is the new type lux —Shining Type Long-Range Induction Armament (Rectoluz) that Allekant and Seidoukan jointly developed.”

“Shining Type Long-Range Induction Armament (Rectoluz)...”

“It’s the mother machine of the thin sword which Julis owned and can freely manipulate multiple terminals (devices). But, it’s a weapon which can’t be managed if the ability for space grasp isn’t high.”

Although Claudia said so, she carefully measured the distance again.

“I see... I think that it’s an amazing technology, but it isn’t somewhat suited for Julis.”

While saying so, Ayato exchange a fleeting glance with Kirin.

Kirin seemed to have guessed what he meant with that alone. Even though it was their first time forming a tag team, perhaps because they were both swordsmen, they could guess each other’s intentions to some extent without even exchanging words.

Senbakiri’s point was still turned at Claudia while Kirin properly paid attention to Julis, too. Although there was no other choice, but to evade the attack of a little while ago as it was a surprise attack, it would be easy to counter attack an attack of that level with Kirin’s sword skill. In that case, Ayato could focus on attacking Claudia.

“Hou? What do you mean by that, Ayato?”

“Exactly as stated. Doesn’t Julis similarly have plenty of techniques that she can freely operate remotely even without such a weapon? I’m saying it like this, but I can’t feel that much originality.”

Though he said it in a slightly provocative way, it was his frank impression. It was an obvious fact that gaining a technique similar to the ability that one already possessed would not become a significant increase in one’s combat capabilities.

However Julis, still smiling, slowly shook her head.

“You don’t really understand, Ayato... Well whatever; in that case, it’d be better to see it with your own eyes!”

As soon as she said that, Julis fiercely shortened the distance towards Kirin.



“Eh!?”

Kirin unintentionally raised her voice as Julis’s action was unexpected.

(No way, does she want to challenge Kirin in a close range combat...?)

Ayato was also surprised.

Thanks to her special training with Ayato and the fact that she has gone through fierce battles in the <Phoenix>, Julis’s close range combat skills evolved beyond recognition these past several months. Although at first, it was to the extent where she could finally followed Ayato’s movements barely with her eyes, now she has become able to cope with them.

But even so, compared with Ayato and Kirin, it was not yet at the level where she could match them. Claudia has evaluated her close range combat ability as being “one step behind” compared to Ayato and Kirin, but going by that logic, Julis’s should be nearly 3 steps behind compared to them.

Be that as it may, Kirin was the leader. Ayato could not afford to let her through without doing anything.

“Oops, I won’t let you do!”

As to block Ayato who tried to break in between Kirin and Julis, Claudia’s slash attacked him.

“Wow!”

Although he reflexively prevented it, Claudia unleashed attacks one after another.

He understood while crossing swords with her, but Claudia’s sword skills had no particular styles. No, more precisely, it was rather a unique sword skill which seemed to remove a proper style after having learned it.

Above all, even if in terms of technique, Ayato had the edge, the twin swords’ attacks exceeded Ayato’s simply in number of moves. Even if

she could not land a direct hit, it was not easy for Ayato to set up a stance for counterattack.

“It’s her special debut with the new model. You shouldn’t get that much in her way, Ayato.”

In the meantime, Julis jumped into Kirin’s range.

Kirin, who revealed a surprised expression at first, immediately changed it and moved to a stance of interception.

“Let’s go, Kirin!”

As Julis shouted so, she swung the twin sword in her hand aiming for Kirin’s school badge. It was a sharp thrust as to tear the wind.

—But, before the point of her sword reached Kirin’s chest, the latter easily brushed it away. Right. As expected Julis’s attacks didn’t work on Kirin.

With her katana turned as is, Kirin cut Julis’s school badge — or so it looked it.

“!?”

However just before it, Kirin’s blow has been prevented by one of the terminals that Julis manipulated.

“...I’m not done yet!”

Even so, Kirin immediately moved with her next attack. She cut up from a low position, cut down to the right, mowed down straight — these beautiful and perfect consecutive attacks were the essence of the technique that Kirin held, “Conjoined Cranes”.

The secret technique of the Toudou Style that even Ayato could not yet completely defeat.

“Fufufu...! It’s indeed a fierce technique!”

—Julis was splendidly defending against these fierce attacks using the six terminals.

“No way...”

Kirin’s “Conjoined Cranes” wasn’t something which could be outdone with only the predominance of a mere number of six. Ayato knew that from experience. Julis could exceptionally deal with Kirin’s sword speed properly.

“Fufufu... do you understand, Ayato? The most astounding point of the Shining Type Long-Range Induction Armament (Rectoluz) is its reaction speed.”

At the dumbfounded Ayato, Claudia laughed while connecting her slashes.

Claudia’s attacks all checked Ayato’s movements without her deeply stepping into his range.

If they seriously crossed swords with each other head on, Ayato would probably win; but the more she takes up tactics of hit-and-run like this, the prospects of her winning, in other words the ability difference between Ayato and Claudia wouldn’t be much different.

“Originally, Julis’s close range combat ability shouldn’t even amount to Toudou-san’s. This was above all because their physical specs cultivated with training so far and their techniques were different. Even if she intends to prevent an attack of Toudou-san, Julis’s body won’t be able to perfectly do it...”

“.....!”

Ayato finally realized what Claudia meant.

“That’s right. She can operate the Shining Type Long-Range Induction Armament (Rectoluz) only with the mind without forcing her body—in other words, the Shining Type Long-Range Induction Armament

(Rectoluz)'s terminals react much faster than Julis herself swings the sword."

"...I see. Looks like I should retract the words I said a while ago!"

As Ayato pushed back Claudia's attack with spirit, he greatly took some distance again.

When he once again sent a gaze at Kirin, Kirin similarly took some distant from Julis.

"Phew... I was surprised. I didn't think that I could defend against "Conjoined Cranes"... But!"

"Kirin-chan!"

It was probably better for them to pull back once here and rebuild a strategy.

Thinking so, Ayato was going to call back Kirin, but Kirin threw a fleeting glance at him and smiled somehow embarrassed.

"U-Um, Ayato-senpai...! Could you just watch?"

"Eh?"

Though he wondered what she meant by that, Kirin immediately fixed her breathing and set an attack to Julis.

"Hohou! So, you come again!"

"—I'm coming!"

A sword flash glittered and Senbakiri's point greatly drew an arc.

But this time too, her attack was blocked by a terminal.

Even so without stopping, Kirin connected to her next attack—

"Here!"

“What!?”

The moment when he thought that the attack was prevented in the same way, Ayato did not overlook the fact that Kirin’s wrist was suddenly twisted.

She probably changed the flow of power.

The terminal which blocked Senbakiri was unable to cope with the sudden change of power and Julis greatly broke her balance.

If that was only it, then it would be just a balance breaking technique. And Julis might also be able to deal with it.

But when that terminal’s light blade came in contact with another terminal’s light blade—and moreover Kirin drove in another blow there, the two terminals interfered with each other and all the six terminals were blown away as they were flipped.

“W-What...!?”

Since the terminals were controlled by thought, if the movements of the six terminals were simultaneously thrown out of order, the one controlling would probably have a hard time to reorganize them.

“Got you!”

There was no way that Kirin would overlook it.

Kirin’s Senbakiri flashed aiming for the school badge of Julis left opened.

The moment when she thought that the match was settled, a black shadow broke in there.

“Phew... it was really close.”

Having blocked Kirin’s slash with crossing twin swords was —Claudia.

“Oh no...!”

In this situation, it was Ayato's task to restrain Claudia.

Naturally, Ayato was properly restraining her, but Claudia seemed to have aimed at the opening at the instant when Ayato had his attention attracted by Kirin's technique.

"I'm sorry, Claudia."

"It's not something to hold a little grudge over."

"...Yes, I know!"

As soon as Julis replied so, the six terminals moved so as to surround Kirin.

"Come out — Falling Crimson Flower of Molten Sky (Semiserrata)!"

Moreover, a magic square unfolded along with Julis's voice and a huge flame Camellia opened its bud overhead Kirin.

(A setting type ability—!? No, since when did she...?)

"Kuh...!"

Even so, Kirin barely evaded the mass of flames, which has fallen, with her exceptional reflexes.

Just before Ayato rushed so as to protect such Kirin—

"Yes, it's checkmate."

<Pan-Dora>'s blade bisected school badge of Kirin, who broke her stance, one step earlier.



"I-I'm sorry, Ayato-senpai! It's because I've jumped ahead alone that...!"

"No, me too, even though I had to restrain Claudia... I'm really sorry!"

After the end of the mock battle, Ayato and Kirin bowed together to each other.

“Now, now, you two. That now was just a mock battle. Besides you two have coordinated to the extent that it was hard to believe that this was the first time you formed a tag.”

“No, you girls, too. I should say as expected of friends from old days.”

When Ayato said so, Julis frowned with a complicated expression.

“It isn’t really like we had some sort of advantage just because we know each other since long ago. Even the match just now regarding the coordination parts, I’ve left almost everything up to Claudia.”

“That’s right. Since I roughly grasp everyone’s battle style, I think that I can come up with a strategy to some extent.”

Though Claudia casually said that, they did not think that she lied after witnessing the match of a little while ago

“...By the way Julis, that last ability you activate — perhaps can you transmit a small prana in this new model lux?”

“Hou, that’s Saya for you. You understood well with only that, huh.”

Julis nodded to Saya who was intently staring at the Shining Type Long-Range Induction Armament (Rectoluz) that she (Julis) held.

“Errr, what do you mean?”

They did not know in which timing the last setting type ability was set, but maybe that was related to it.

“With this Shining Type Long-Range Induction Armament (Rectoluz), it’s possible to diffuse my prana over to the terminals. As you also know, an operation to perform preparations for the activation of setting type ability at some place is necessary beforehand, but by using these terminals, I can greatly omit that process.”

“That... sounds amazing.”

If the words just now were true, Julis’s tactics should substantially increase. Furthermore, it has also been demonstrated that the Shining Type Long-Range Induction Armament (Rectoluz) covered the weakness of close range combat, so you might at least say that as for Julis personally, she has been considerably strengthened.

“Hmph... it’s unfair for only Julis to power up.”

Though Saya puffed her cheeks, she has not taken her off the Shining Type Long-Range Induction Armament (Rectoluz) even now.

“No, I don’t think so.”

“Hmm?”

When Ayato said that, Saya finally raised her face.

“What do you mean?”

“Speaking about power up or rather improving one’s skills, I think that goes for Kirin-chan, too.”

“Fueeh?”

Perhaps because she was surprised that her name was suddenly brought up, Kirin’s body shook.

“That technique which broke Julis’s guard... That was the application of “Banish Evil Spirits” right?”

“N-No, rather than application or copying... since I was impressed after watching it in a match Ayato-senpai before, I secretly practiced it... And when I try it at the time of the fight in Lieseltania recently, it went well... No, I-I know that it isn’t yet good enough, so... um...I wanted Ayato-senpai to see it...”

Kirin confusedly explained with her face which turned bright red.

“Banish Evil Spirits” was a hidden technique of the Amagiri Bright Dragon Style and a technique which controlled the flow of power of multiple opponents and made them attack each other. The point that she learnt it just by understanding and practicing was a surprise, but what was astounding above all was that the technique of perception expansion called state of “cognition” was originally in the base of the Amagiri Bright Dragon Style Hidden Technique.

This was something impossible to accomplish in a short amount of time, and from what Ayato saw, there was no signs showing that Kirin mastered it, either. Which meant that Kirin reached that domain purely only with technique.

(She’s really unpredictable...)

He has felt that Kirin exceeded him in sword ability since before, but it might not possibly be such a level.

“...Hmm. I also have to power up.”

“My, my, it looks like you’re motivated, Sasamiya-san.”

“I won’t be able to help Ayato if I’m left behind.”

Saya said so and deployed one of her luxes.

“...Well, I’ll also participate in the next mock battle.”

“Fufufu, then let’s decide the combination of the next mock battle.”

Like this, the daily training of these five people continued for a while from that day — and before they noticed, Ayato and company moved up to second year of Seidoukan Academy high school.

Chapter 3 – School Festival Rhapsody I

— — World Dragon Seventh Institute, Yellow Dragon Temple.

“I cannot consent with that!”

In one room, Zhao HuFeng’s enraged voice echoed.

“Why must we form a team with those twins?!”

“Hmm, even if you say that”

While dangling her feet as she sat on the Kamiza¹ of a Burmese rosewood round table decorated with a gorgeous craftsmanship, having warded off HuFeng’s vehement objection was his master Fan XingLu.

The siblings Li ShenYun and Li ShenHua were standing behind her with serious faces.

“HuFeng, do you have any complaints about my selection?”

“I have a lot of complaints!”

“...You have now come to speak quite frankly.”

To HuFeng who affirmed without hesitation, XingLu muttered rather impressed.

Certainly, when HuFeng became a disciple of XingLu, he was too uptight/stiff and there were many cases where he was unable to have his way with his complaints. But, HuFeng had his ability recognized, took the position of unifying the Wood Faction and as he was entrusted the task of XingLu’s secretary at the same time, such uptightness vanished in no time.

As he was made to go along with XingLu’s words and actions beyond unprecedented amounts around the clock, he had no room to be

¹ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kamiza>

reserved or nervous. Of course, he was paying respect to XingLu as her disciple, but this and that were different stories.

“Well~, I don’t particularly mind it though~”

The woman sitting next to HuFeng — — Cecily Wong broke in.

Her wavy long hair was light brown and she also had well-ordered, yet clear-cut features. In World Dragon where there were many students of the Asia area, this appearance of Cecily was conspicuous; but even though she looked like this, she was the Taoist which unified the Water Faction, XingLu’s disciple N°2, and World Dragon Seventh Institute’s rank #4 with the nickname of <Raigeki Senka>. Although she was a person equivalent to senior disciple to HuFeng, their fellowship itself was older and they achieved being the runner-up as tag partners in the last <Phoenix>.

“At least when it comes to magic, these guys are already far above me~. Besides, if we make a team, shouldn’t we make a strong one?”

“You are too sketchy, Cecily. It is not a matter of ‘it’s good as long as one is talented’. Besides, with three Taoists... no, fourth people including the Great Master Brother, the balance as team composition will be bad, right?”

Cecily’s character has not changed from those days. She was sketchy and hated troublesome things. She was the type of person to clean a room in one go after it was in disorder rather than regularly tidying it up.

— — No, correction. Even in that case, Cecily would left it to someone else without setting her hands on it... or rather in most cases HuFeng was the one undertaking the cleaning.

“Huh?! What, HuFeng. Are you by any chance frustrated that no one was selected from the Wood Faction? I see, I see~, if that’s the case, you should just frankly say it; how cute~”

When Cecily revealed a complacent smile, she clutched HuFeng to her voluptuous chest and stroked his head.

“Wai-! P-Please stop that, Cecily!”

HuFeng turned bright red and struggled in breaking loose from it, but Cecily was physically strong despite being a Taoist.

“It’s all right, it’s all right; you know that Big Sister² is properly trained in taijutsu, too, right~?”

“T-That’s true, but I don’t mean that... no, like I said please release me!”

Cecily was by no means a bad person, but HuFeng somewhat disliked this part of hers that treated him like a child.

“As usual, you two get along quite well.”

Though XingLu innocently laughed watching them, at that time the back door opened and a tall male entered the room.

“...I’ve kept you waiting.”

His sharp look, his virile features, his tough body which one could understand was toned even from over his clothes and his carriage without any opening at all let the man wear something like aura giving a feeling of coercion to those who saw him.

“G-Greetings, Great Master Brother...!”

“...It’s fine, sit down.”

The man commanded HuFeng, who hurriedly tried to stand and bow, with only some words.

² here she refers to herself as Onee-san which means big sister as she tells him not to struggle too much since despite being a magician/Taoist, she is also trained in taijutsu, thus her physical strength

HuFeng who was overawed by the sharpness of the glint in his eyes could do nothing but sit again as he was about to stand up.

— — Woo Xiao Fay.

World Dragon Seventh Institute's rank #2 with the nickname of <Hagun Star>. He was XingLu's best disciple whom she brought along when she appeared in this academy and who surpassed HuFeng in martial arts and Cecily in Star Senjutsu.

But, Xiao Fay usually secluded himself in the depths of the Yellow Dragon Temple and rarely appeared in public. It has been a quite a long time since HuFeng directly met him like this, too. Allegedly, it was said that he was the only one who could serve as XingLu's training partner, but HuFeng and even Cecily did not know whether it was true.

When that Xiao Fay stood before the round table, he slowly put down the tray he held in hand. On a closer look, there was a set of Chinese tea implement there.

"U-Um... Greast Master Brother?"

"....."

HuFeng unintentionally called out to him so, but Xiao Fay stopped him with one hand without giving him a glance. His eyes were focused on the tea implement at hand. Xiao Fay was familiar with it— — but as he poured hot water with careful hands, the tea leaves softly danced inside the glass-made tea implement.

As time of silence passed as is for a while and Xiao Fay, who gave a small nod before long, poured tea into tea cups for the number of people, he quietly distributed them around to HuFeng and company.

Xiao Fay who finished the distribution sat on the seat in front of HuFeng and drank a mouthful of his tea share— —

"...Umu."

He nodded still expressionless, yet contentedly.

“N-No, no! What are you doing, Great Master Brother?! You should just let somebody else serve tea! Or rather, I’ll do it!”

HuFeng who was taken aback finally came to his senses, drew back his chair and stood up.

“No, but this is also Master’s command...”

“Master!”

“Hmm?”

As HuFeng sternly turned his gaze, XingLu was drinking the tea, which Xiao Fay served, with a calm face.

“What do you let Great Master Brother do?!”

“The tea that Xiao Fay serves is the most delicious, so I can’t help it.”

Saying so, XingLu joyfully laughed.

“Well, this tea is certainly delicious~”

Cecily sitting next to HuFeng did not seem to mind it much either.

“It’s fine, so you too, stop always complaining and just drink it.”

“No, but...”

“Just do it.”

“Y-Yes...”

Pressed by XingLu, HuFeng nervously carried the tea to his mouth, too.

“ — — !”

At that moment, a mellow fragrance spread inside his mouth. Although HuFeng could not say that he knew much about tea, it was a refreshing taste that he has never tasted so far.

“C-Certainly, this is delicious...”

“...Umu.”

Xiao Fay who heard these words nodded somewhat proudly.

“Come on you two too, how long do you intend to stay like that?”

“Y-Yes...”

“Well then...”

Urged by XingLu, ShenYun and ShenHua nervously sat on the seats, too.

Since the twins weren't much acquainted with Xiao Fay, they were probably dumbfounded, too.

Thinking so, HuFeng felt only just a little sense of familiarity to them.

“Now then, I will announce once again. Among my disciples, I select you five to participate to the next <Gryps>. Don't disappoint me.”

XingLu's tone was light in the same way until now, but a peremptory pressure lurked within it.

The fourth people except HuFeng immediately took a stance of Bao Qan³ with a bow — —

“Yes... understood. I do no longer have any complaint.”

³ already explained in vol4 ch1; you can also see these pictures: https://www.google.fr/search?q=包拳礼&client=opera&hs=aYH&biw=1024&bih=660&source=lnms&tbn=isch&sa=X&ei=pSDwVJC4F8Tmas_AgtAC&ved=0CAYQ_AUoAQ

HuFeng finally resigned himself, too and took the same stance as the others, slightly late.

"However, Could I at least hear the reason why you add those twins to the team?"

"What, it was just to compensate the team's weakness."

"Weakness?"

"Both HuFeng and Cecily have ability, but somehow you're too honest. For a team, people who are able to handle the dirty work like them will be necessary, right?"

"...I see."

HuFeng could not but consent after she said so.

HuFeng himself was aware that he tended to like head-on fights and as for Cecily, she had a battle style which began with brute force approach and ended with brute force. It was hard to say that either of them was good at cunning strategy like the twins.

Then, HuFeng noticed the only person who was not mentioned.

"Master. By the way, what about Great Master Brother?"

"Hmm? Yes, he has no problem either way. Do whatever you like."

"Yes..."

"Hohoho, then everyone, you should endeavor in training until the day."

XingLu who contentedly nodded said that and jumped off her chair in a bouncing way.

"You're going out... don't tell me, are you going to get entangled with the usual event again?"

“Yes. The public performance’s day is close. I must also confirm the completion.”

HuFeng intended to implicitly hint “please stop it”, but XingLu pretended not to understand it.

“When you say that event, are you referring to the school festival?”

“That’s right. Really, it’s unheard-of...”

To Cecil’s question like it was somebody else’s problem, HuFeng deeply sighed while holding his head.



One might say that spring was the season of the year where Asterisk’s students were mostly excited.

Of course, many students of Asterisk came here as they dreamt of distinguishing themselves in the <Festa>, but at the same time those who have given up on it and chose to enjoy their youth were not few in numbers, either. For such students, the school festival held in spring every year was more of an enjoyment than the <Festa>.

— — To Eishiro who emphasized as such, Ayato nodded as he was honestly impressed.

“Heeh... I see. So that’s why it’s so large-scale.”

When looking outside of the window from the classroom, preparations for stages and food stands were advancing here and there on the site even now at lunch break. As the school festival opening would be in two days, it seemed to be in the final stage everywhere.

“They will be whatever one likes such as the lecture meeting where well-known OB will be invited, the presentation of various clubs, confrontation battles with other academies, parades, drama plays and the like. Of course, it’s large-scale since it will continue for three days in all of Asterisk.”

“But if I’m not mistaken, wasn’t this sort of school festival only Japan culture?”

“Yes, at first it seemed to be an event only in Seidoukan, but now all the other schools have completely become familiar with it, too. Besides in Asterisk, along with the <Festa>, the school festival is one of the major events attracting customers.”

Eishiro was carefully explaining while nibbling melon bread.

Since there weren’t any class changes in Seidoukan Academy, neither classmates nor class teachers changed even though they became second year students. At most, there were only seat changes. Still, Ayato felt a strange connection having Eishiro sitting like this at the seat behind him.

“After all, it’s the only event where all the six academies opened their sites. It’s basically only in this period that people of the general public can enter the academies, so of course it will gather people, right?”

“Which means that not only tourists, but we also can enter other academies, right?”

“Yes. Although, the places that are being opened are only the school site and some buildings; so if you carelessly try to enter somewhere you shouldn’t, this fellow will give you a warning.”

Saying so, Eishiro pointed at the school badge on his chest.

“By the way, pseudo-school badges which have that function are also distributed to the general visitors when they enter the school premises. Therefore during the school Festival, the control of the non-carrying of school badges and the duels became more severe. You should be careful, too.”

“I’ll bear it in mind.”

Regarding that warning, it was announced many times by the academy, too.

“Now then, I guess I’ll go do another task.”

As Eishiro who finished his lunch licked his fingers, he jumped off from the desk where he was sitting.

“Another task now? What will you do for the afternoon class?”

“We’re in the final stage just now. After all, it’s the biggest event ever done since the founding of our club.”

Eishiro was devoted to the school festival’s event as he stayed overnight every day lately.

It was not an event of Seidoukan, too.

During the school festival period, there would also been a festival in Asterisk urban area and various events would be opened there; it seemed that Eishiro’s newspaper club would be responsible for one of them.

Although as for the event itself, the technical system clubs of the three academies Seidoukan/Allekant/World Dragon would take a leading part and advance, and pro-media clubs like that of Eishiro and company seemed to be in charge of the advertising and publicizing.

“Although it’s an off-campus event, a three academies joint event is rare after all. It’ll be quite large scale, so look forward to it.”

“That’s good and all, but can you stop beating around the bush and tell me what you’ll do?”

It seemed to be a participation type event, but Eishiro has not yet revealed the details.

“I’ll leave the fun for until the event’s day.”

“...And it comes from someone who forcibly makes people enter it.”

As Ayato lightly turned a blaming look while smiling wryly, Eishiro distorted his mouth as he broadly grinned.

“Hehehe, about that I’m seriously grateful to you. With the name of the <Phoenix> winner among the participants, the event will increase in value with that alone.”

Although Ayato tentatively lent his name as he was begged by Eishiro, he began to worry a little because he did not think that it would become that big a deal.

“But, is it really all right? I also said it before, but I have a prior engagement during the school festival. I can’t absolutely promise that I’ll be able to participate.”

Since he was indebted to Eishiro in various ways, he really wanted to cooperate with him; but his participation would be difficult depending on the situation.

“Can’t you somehow make so that you’ll able to? Hey, please!”

However, Eishiro joined both his hands and bowed his head as he assumed the posture of praying.

Ayato felt slightly uncomfortable as he saw him like that.

“At any rate, you’re quite enthusiastic. Is there any reason for that?”

Eishiro was usually enthusiastic about the newspaper club activities and Ayato also understood that this was a major event, but even so, this enthusiasm of his was not normal.

“Ah, no... to tell you the truth, rather than me, my club president is already extremely enthusiastic about it, you see. In the first place, it’s also her who directly went into the Meteoric Engineering research meeting and has gotten the participation of the newspaper club.”

“When you say president, are you talking about that bob cut⁴?”

⁴ as to say a person with a bob cut, and I guess here that Eishiro’s club president is a girl see: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bob_cut

Though vague, Ayato recalled having seen her face once over a space window.

“Since president will also graduate in this year, she wants to launch huge fireworks in her last year. So I, her faithful dog, am doing my best like this, too.”

Eishiro tried joking as he said so, but even if he hid it by doing so, one could understand that he was unusually embarrassed.

This was the first time that Ayato saw Eishiro like this.

Perhaps because Ayato guessed his true motives, Eishiro stopped beating around the bush and scratched his head.

“Ah, so it’s something like that. I’m slightly indebted to the president. I’ll have nightmares if I don’t return it... So please, Amagiri!”

“Hmm, even I want to do something about it, but...”

Though he was surprised at Eishiro’s laudable side, he could not fail to keep his promise.

“Rather, what is that prior engagement you’re speaking about? If it’s fine with you, could you tell me...?”

“Ugh...! Errr, that’s, um...”

His prior engagement of school festival was with that diva Sylvia Lyyneheym.

As a thanks for having helping him in rescuing Flora before, for some reason he would have a date with her in the school festival.

But, since she didn’t contact him at all even since the New Year beginning, he has begun to think that maybe it was a joke, but — —

『Ah, hello Ayato-kun? It's about the school festival, but I'm sorry for the late contact. I had a bit of trouble to pick a day off. But I manage to win some vacation days, so let's have our date in three days, okay?』

Just the other day, he received such a message from the very Sylvia.

...Be that as it may, he could not afford to talk about such a thing to Eishiro.

"A-Anyway, I'll just try discussing with the person. But, it might be at the very last minute that I can get a confirmation."

Although he would meet with Sylvia in three days, he has not heard yet up to their date's small schedule. Or rather, it looked like Sylvia fairly overdid it in order to take some days off, and his call could not get through at all.

Even if there was no problem since he only heard the appointment's place and time, at this rate he might not be able to contact her until the appointed day.

"OK, that's enough. I'm expecting a favorable reply as much as possible."

As Eishiro said so, he suddenly changed the topic as he recalled something.

"By the way, you'll have a break from your team training during the school festival, right?"

"Ah, yes. It looks like Julis will practice independently though..."

Claudia seemed to have work as the student council president, and it looked like she would run around here and there during the school festival period. On the other hand, Julis, seemingly not having any interest at all in the school festival, said that she would seclude herself in the training room.

"Heeh, she's a hard-liner, that Princess."

As Eishiro looked towards Julis as he said so, Julis who was eating bread that she bought, alone at her seat, stole a glance and stared at Eishiro.

“What? Do you have any complaints, Yabuki?”

“N-No, not at all...!”

To the intensity of her stare, Eishiro backed off with a cramp face.

“H-Hey, isn’t the Princess somehow in a bad mood?”

“That’s right. She has been like this all along lately...”

When Ayato and Eishiro brought their faces near to each other, and were exchanging such a conversation in low voices.

“Hmph!”

Julis snorted with a displeased face and turned her face away. At the seat next to Julis’s, even Saya was glaring at Ayato with reproachful eyes for some reason. No, her expression was as usual, but the fact that she was angry was transmitted by the atmosphere.

“...Amagiri, do you really have no idea why they are in a bad mood?”

“No, even if you ask me that...”

Then, the bell announcing the lunch break end resounded.

“It’s bad, it’s bad, I was unintentionally absorbed in the talk. Then, I’ll be off.”

“No, like I said, Yabuki! What about the afternoon classes?”

He called out so to Eishiro who headed to the door with casual steps, but the self-proclaimed newspaper club’s ace waved his hand while looking back.

“It’s fine. Afternoon classes are always very boring anyway, so it will make no difference whether I’m here or not.”

But when he was going to leave the classroom, Eishiro bumped into a woman who was just entering.

“Oops, my bad, my bad. I wasn’t looking in front of...”

The face of Eishiro who started to say so turned pale in an instant.

“Oh, I don’t really mind it. More than that, you said something quite interesting, Yabuki. Is my class so boring? Haah⁵?”

Yatsuzaki Kyouko, their homeroom teacher, with a smile still stuck on her face, casually raised the nail bat that she held in hand.

“No, um, that’s, how to put it...! Y-You’re wrong! I-It’s a misunderstanding, Kyouko-chan! You’ll understand if we talk this thro— —”

Approximately at the same time as Ayato unintentionally covered his eyes, a very pitiful strike sound resounded through the classroom.

✧

— —Seidoukan Academy, Promenade.

The school festival’s first day was blessed with a fine weather and the sunlight filtering through the fresh green canopy was also dazzling.

Perhaps for that reason, the school festival’s success was also considerable and it overflowed with people everywhere. This promenade was fairly detached even in Seidoukan Academy’s site and there should have neither food stands nor stalls around, but even if one sat on a bench and absentmindedly looked around, figures of people coming and going did not die out.

⁵ she exclaims here like a yakuza

Even so, because it could be regarded as cute compared with the congestion of the area continuing from the front gate to the school buildings group, it might be said that it was still a calmed one.

“— —I keep you waiting, Ayato-kun.”

When he raised his gaze as his name was suddenly called, a girl wearing a large hat over her eyes was standing there.

“No, you’re on time. More importantly, I’m surprised you know well such a place, Sylvie.”

Having designed this bench as the meeting place was the girl — —Sylvia.

It would not be strange if she was a student of Seidoukan, but it was slightly surprising that Sylvia who commuted to Queen Veil knew such a remote place.

“I have come to play here at the time of school festival several times after all. As expected, it will be scary to meet in front the main gate.”

Sylvia lightly shrugged her shoulders as she said so.

Certainly Sylvia was exceptionally good at erasing all trace of presence, but even so the possibility of her identity being exposed was not zero.

“Actually, I wanted to be smartly dressed a little more, but... as expected it’ll be bad to stand out too much.”

Sylvia almost had the same appearance of jeans and blouse that she had when they first met.

“No, I think that it looks good enough on you.”



Sylvia, when appearing on TV, was either generally dressed up, or in Queen Veil's uniform. Of course, he thought that such outfits looked good on her, but such simple attire also fitted well with Sylvia's carefree and cheerful personality.

Then, after Sylvia blinked with a slightly surprised face, she slightly loosened her cheeks.

"Hmm... you said it plainly. But thank you. It makes me quite happy."

Then, she bent her body and suddenly drew her face closer.

"Ho-we-ver! I think yours is a little problem."

"Eh? W-What is?"

His heart throbbed as Sylvia's beautiful face drew close.

"Your outfit. Certainly, it's me who said that Ayato-kun should also disguise himself, but with that, you look rather too suspicious."

"I-Is that so...?"

There was no doubt that Ayato who was the <Phoenix> winner was now a celebrity. Moreover, if he were to walk with Sylvia, Ayato would certainly need to disguise himself so that he would not be recognized at first glance, too.

Therefore although cliché, he chose an outfit of hat and sunglasses so that he could not be exposed at all, but looked like it was ineffective.

"Even when we met before, you weren't heavily dressed up; but today's outfit is outrageous."

The evaluation of Sylvia who frowned with both her hands on her waists was unexpectedly severe.

“Well, I’m glad I make preparations expecting that something like this might happen.”

“...Preparations?”

“It’s fine, it’s fine. Just sit down, Ayato-kun.”

Sylvia took off Ayato’s hat and swept his hair all back. Then, she took out something like a thin hair band from her bag and put it on Ayato’s head.

“Errr, what was that just now?”

“It’s the same as the headband that I use. Though for a short time, it can change one’s hair color. Well more exactly, it only shows as if your hair color changed.”

I see, there also existed such a convenient item.

“And I’ll complete it by replacing your sunglasses with lensless glasses. — —look, what do you think?”

When he looked into the compact⁶ which Sylvia has held out, his face whose impression completely changed was reflected.

No matter what he had to say first, that his hair turned blond was probably the biggest change.

The lensless glasses also had a much more fashionable design than the ones he used for his disguise, and the hair band could not be seen as it was concealed in his hair.

With this, the risk of his identity being exposed completely disappeared.

“All right, since our preparations are complete, shall we begin our date?”

⁶ portable makeup and mirror case

When Sylvia said so, she took Ayato's arm and made him stand up.

"...Understood. I shall accompany you, my lady."

"I want you not to accompany, but to properly escort me though."

Sylvia smoothly linked arms with Ayato and looked at his face with upturned eyes.

He was completely led by her pace.

"Ugh... I-I'll do my best."

"Good. Well then first, could you show me around in this Seidoukan Academy?"

At her request, Ayato unintentionally tilted his head to the side.

"That's fine with me, but... are you all right with not watching things such stage or event?"

"Hmm... if there's something I have in mind, I guess it's all right to observe it a little. I feel like I want to see various things, but my objective is all academies conquest after all."

While walking along the promenade towards the school buildings, Sylvia eagerly told so as she strongly clenched her fist.

"Wait, do you intend to go around all the six academies?"

"Of course I'm not saying I'll do it all today. But, it's for that reason that I got a break for three days after all."

In that case, it meant that they must visit at least one other academy other than this Seidoukan today.

Since it was still forenoon, there was probably no problem time wise; but if it was that schedule, certainly they could not afford to leisurely enjoy divertissement.

“But, if there is an event or something that Ayato-kun wants to see, I don’t mind you giving priority to it.”

“Ah, then there is an event which I was requested to participate in by a friend, so may I show up there?”

“Ah, are you perhaps talking about this?”

When Ayato told so, Sylvia skillfully operated her portable terminal with one hand and opened a space window.

A quite showy site where “Great Shock! Grand Coliseum” was written on top was displayed there. The date was the school festival’s last day and the place was Sirius Dome. But in the columns of the contents, only “Participation Type Field Simulation Battle!” was written; nothing was written about what kind of event it was.

“Look, there is Ayato-kun’s name here.”

“...Wow, this is written with quite big characters.”

Ahead of where Sylvia pointed at, was written “<Phoenix> Champion Amagiri Ayato’s participation!” in a big way at the top of the guest entry list.

“Since it became the hot topic on the net, I was a little interested in it. Ayato-kun, you aren’t the kind of person to participate in things like this, right?”

“Well, yes. But I have a friend who is among the organizer of this event you see. I couldn’t just turn him down; or rather I was forced to participate...”

“I see, so that’s it.”

Sylvia closed the space window while saying so. They were just at the end of the promenade; it was probably because the number of people around increased at a stretch.

This area was the back of the middle school building; they could not go inside the school building, but food stands lined up in a row as they surrounded the school building group.

“But since I had a prior engagement with Sylvie, if it seems impossible, then I will decline it.”

“No, it’s all right. I’m also a little interested in it — — ah, wait a minute!”

Then, Sylvia suddenly stopped.

Her gaze seemed to be directed at the food stand immediately beside them.

“Onii-san⁷, please give me two.”

“Okay~”

When Sylvia called out to the stand seller so, she was immediately handed two ice creams.

“Here, Ayato-kun.”

“Thank you. But why ice cream?”

“Ice cream is something indispensable for a date hiding one’s status. Well more exactly, it’s the gelato⁸ though.”

“I see.”

She seemed to liken it to old movies.

— — And.

『Well then, let’s go with the next tune~!』

They noticed that a song with a very loud volume was flowing from before them.

⁷ refers here to the stand seller

⁸ Italian ice cream

When they turned their gazes, a huge space screen was unfolded multiangular up in the air of the open space before the high school building. It seemed like it was broadcasting a live concert held in Sirius Dome.

“Ah, looks like Miluše and the others are full of vigor.”

Sylvia muttered so while lovelily licking the ice cream.

“Are they acquaintances of yours?”

“Yes. They are my cute kouhais⁹. Have you heard about Rusalka?”

“Yes; so these girls are the Rusalka.”

Ayato once again looked up at the girls projected to the space screen.

Although not to the extent of Sylvia, it was a Girls Rock Band which boasted of a global degree of popularity.

Speaking of which, Ayato felt like he has heard the music, which was playing now, somewhere.

“If I’m not mistaken, they will take part in the next <Gryps>, right?”

“I guess it’ll be so if it goes according to Petra-san’s publicity strategy... It’s originally a group which decorated its striking debut in the last <Gryps>. Ah, Petra-san is our board chairman, and Rusalka’s and my producer. Though she’s malicious in various ways, she’s competent.”

“Heeh...”

For a moment, Claudia’s face came to his mind; those standing above others might be often like that.

⁹ Kouhai: a junior in an organization; the opposite of a senpai. In this case, an underclassman

“Ayato-kun, you and your friends will participate in the <Gryps>, right? In that case, you should be careful. Those girls are quite capable. Well, they’ve a slightly stormy side in them though...”

Sylvia’s voice gradually became small, and Ayato was not able to catch the latter half very well.

“Won’t you yourself participate in the <Gryps>, Sylvie?”

“Hmm, I basically narrow down to the <Lindvolus>. I also want to take my revenge for the last <Lindvolus>.”

Sylvia was the last <Lindvolus> runner up. The opponent whom Sylvia lost against was that <Venomous Witch> Orphelia.

“— —I’m unexpectedly bad at giving up, you know?”

Sylvia said so with a self-derisive smile.

And then while exchanging a silly conversation with Sylvia for a while, he showed around Seidoukan here and there. As the person himself also said, they peeked into events for only a short while and spent time at those events a bit longer than expected

The only exception was an event named “water survival” held in an indoor pool. It was an event hosted jointly by Seidoukan Academy’s swimming club and shooting club; simply put, it was a survival game which used water guns; but there a person with outstanding ability seemed to have caught their attention.

“Hey, if I’m not mistaken, she’s Ayato’s acquaintance, right?”

“Eh?”

When looking ahead of where Sylvia pointed at from a second floor of the indoor pool— —

“Saya...?”

There, his childhood friend holding large water guns in both hands was performing a fight in school swimsuit. He did not know what the rules were, but Saya seemed to have turned most of the other competitors into her enemies. There were probably more than 20 people.

The pool was dotted with many floating landmasses, but Saya was knocking down her opponents down into the pool one after another with unmatched accurate shots while leaping at them with well placed jumps.

“T-This is amazing! Sasamiya-san, being irresistible means exactly this! As expected, <Phoenix> best four isn’t just for show!”

The quite amateurish live reporter also raised a somewhat excited voice.

“Hmm... her balance sense is amazing, but the most amazing thing is her dynamic vision, I would say. One can’t really imitate that shooting precision in the air while dodging attacks.”

Sylvia also looked impressed.

When Saya sank all the members except herself before long, the buzzer resounded as to announce Saya’s victory.

“...With that said, this third game is the victory of Sasamiya Saya-san who annihilated all the other participants with overwhelming power!”

On the plain platform built to the poolside, the man who was apparently the live reporter raised Saya’s hand.

But Saya, no showing any behavior of being happy, did not change her complexion one bit even when she was handed the trophy.

“Then Sasamiya-san, please could you say one or two words?”

“...It was irritating. I am not satisfied.”

“...Yes? Errr, what on earth...”



Though the man cocked his head in puzzlement, Saya continued her words ignoring him.

“I want to do it once more.”

“N-No, no! I’m sorry, but that’s a little...!”

“— —L-Let’s go, Sylvie.”

The confused man and Saya who tried to force her way through was still continuing, but Ayato felt a chill and left the place with Sylvia.

Chapter 4 – School Festival Rhapsody II

—Queen Veil Girl’s Academy Student Dormitory, Top Floor.

The room of Rusalka’s leader, Miluše was in one of its corner. It was thanks to the privileges of being Queen Veil Girl’s Academy rank #3 that she was able to set up a living room on this floor. From the perspective of Mahulena, who was Rusalka’s youngest member and was unranked¹⁰, one might say that it was basically a place like heaven.

But, even though Mahulena should have, since long ago, held yearning and envy for this place, such a thing had completely disappeared already. For better or worse, that was probably related to the fact that she was selected as member of the group called Rusalka which boasted the second highest popularity in Queen Veil Girl’s Academy.

(Sylvia-san is really amazing, but that person is...)

After Mahulena lightly sighed, she knocked on that room’s door.

“Geez, you’re late, Mahulena~”

¹⁰ Meaning that she isn’t an up-and-coming student

Then the door was immediately opened and Miluše, who had puffed her cheeks, welcomed Mahulena with her hands on her waist.

“I’m sorry, I had a little talk with the board chairman.”

“Hmm, then it can’t be helped. Anyways enter, enter; Everyone is already here.”

As Miluše said so nonchalantly, she invited Mahulena in the living room.

Anyway, the person called Miluše — or rather all the members of Rusalka did not think too deeply about things. No, if speaking of thinking, then they are thinking; but the depth of their thought was only comparable to that of a kiddie pool.¹¹

Therefore, Mahulena who had a relatively good understanding — although the person herself thought that it was to the degree of an average person — was basically supposed to humbly listen to the message’s contents and convey it to the other members while plainly explaining it in a way easy to understand for them.

“Thank you, sorry for the intrusion...”

Just as Miluše said, Rusalka’s members had gathered.

Although Miluše’s room was quite spacious, articles were somehow scattered about in disorder and it was hard to say that the room was beautiful even as flattery. The sloppiness of living alone such as; upside down stuffed toys strewn here and there, magazines piled up haphazardly and clothes that were left untidy seemed to embody it.

Though it might look like this, the cleaning staff should be regularly tidying it up; but in most cases within three days, a disastrous scene much the same as this one occurred again.

¹¹ basically they are comparable to children

Only the space around the table, where the members sat, was empty; but judging from the heaped-up mountain alongside the wall, they were probably things just piled up aside for the time being. Mahulena quietly sat down at the corner.

“All right, all the members have gathered!”

Miluše’s voice was indeed good as one would expect from her vocals.

“Well then today too, let’s begin the “what to do in order to oust Sylvia Lyyneheym” meeting!”

“Okay”

“Gotcha!”

“Yay~! I was waiting for this!”

“N-No, um...”

As usual it was a simple agenda, but surprisingly all the members except Mahulena were in high spirits and serious.

Moreover, this was the 73rd time they had such a meeting. If you wondered why she remembered it, that was because none other than Mahulena was assigned to keep the records of the proceedings.

Although they performed a live concert today in Sirius Dome and afterwards had a round of courtesy calls with the Integrated Enterprise Foundation’s main executives, who had come for an inspection of the school festival, it was a wonder where this stamina of theirs came from.

“Hey! Mahulena, are you properly listening?”

“Ah, y-yes. Sorry.”

As Miluše snapped her fingers, Mahulena hurriedly straightened herself.

“Today for sure, we must at all costs devise an amazing strategy which will render that Sylvia speechless!”

“Yes... I’ll do my best.”

Although she replied like that for the time being to Miluše who reinforced the meeting’s purpose while clenching her fist, Mahulena has inwardly given up thinking “no, it’s absolutely impossible...”

Of course, it wasn’t like she sold out Rusalka. They had published several world-wide hits and even when looking at the charts¹², it was no exaggeration to say that they had no rival other than Sylvia in the same generation.

But they did not seem to be pleased with it.

It wasn’t as if Mahulena did not think about how splendid it would be if they were to drag down Sylvia and stand on the top of the music scene, but their opponent was too much for them to handle. Sylvia Lyyneheym was a genuine outstanding talent... no, more than that, she was one which you would only see in 100 years. On the other hand although Rusalka was popular amongst the young people, the support became weak once a certain age group was exceeded.

¹² Rankings of the songs and artists I would assume

・実力行使。正面から決闘！
・弱点を責める。水中で攻撃！



“Well, does anyone have any ideas?!”

Miluše looked around at all the members as she said so.

“Okay! Well then first I’ll have you listen to my good idea!”

The first person who bluntly raised her hand was Tuulia, the rhythm guitarist.

“Oh, how promising, Tuulia! Then, then?”

“We should right out go with the use of force! We should force her to a duel and crush her head on!”

“...No, like I’ve said, haven’t we all already tried that many times...?”

While being fed up with it, Mahulena remonstrated Tuulia who was next to her. As expected even the other members had dejected expressions.

It was no wonder, since Tuulia had proposed a use of force like this many times before — that if they could not win with music, they should at least stand against her in a duel like the students of Asterisk should. Furthermore, because Sylvia’s fame is great and also due to the fact that she was rank #1, it would certainly be a great blow to Sylvia if Rusalka won.

But, it wasn’t as if they haven’t tried such a simple thing before.

Not only Tuulia, but all the members of Rusalka challenged Sylvia to a duel and they were completely defeated — by the way, Mahulena was reluctant, but unable to oppose the pressure of the other members, she reluctantly challenged Sylvia and it was an instant kill.

However, Tuulia waved her small index finger with a fearless smile.

“Tsk tsk tsk... Hear me out till the end. The truth is I, who am always contemplating on anti-Sylvia Lyyneheym measures, finally found her weakness!”

“Her weakness... Seriously!?”

All the members’ gazes were concentrated all at once on Tuulia.

“Yes, I’m dead serious. Listen, she needs to sing in order to use her ability, right? Then, if we drive her into a situation where she can’t sing, she wouldn’t be able to display her ability.”

“...It indeed adds up.”

Päivi, the drummer, who usually did not change her expression, deeply nodded.

“But, but, exactly what kind of situation is Sylvie unable to sing in?”

When Monica, the bassist, tilted her head to the side, Tuulia faltered (hemmed and hawed) with a somewhat bewildered face.

It looked like she had not specifically thought about it.

“Well that’s... for example, um, like... inside the water.”

“...Do you intend to duel while swimming?”

It wasn’t as if there has never been precedent of submarine warfare in an exhibition match, but such situation was hardly possible in usual duels and official ranking battles. If while fighting on the waterside, one were to drag a battle into water, it would still be understandable; but in the first place Sylvia would probably have many ways to deal with it such as flying in the air or freezing the water’s surface. Depending on the situation, if it was Sylvia she might as well divide the waters into two like Moses.

“Ah, then how about attacking her when she catches a cold and can utter her voice?”

“...There’s no way she’d accept a duel in such a situation, right?”

“Hmm, other situations where she can’t sing... ah, like in a vacuum?”

“.....”

Honestly, they were more amazed to learn that Tuulia held knowledge about the fact that sound was not transmitted in a vacuum.

“All right, next!”

As Miluše gave up, she clapped her hands and made another fresh start.

“I have one bright idea.”

Having raised her hand was Päivi.

“If Sylvia’s evaluation were to drop, ours would relatively rise. What I mean is we should just spread information disparaging her even if it’s a lie.”

“You’ve a point, but if the like of false rumor goes too far, Benetnash might move, you know? Wouldn’t that be bad?”

For Queen Veil’s Espionage Organization Benetnash which was good at manipulation of public opinion, Rusalka had also been under their care one way or another. If there was something about Sylvia who was currently Queen Veil’s symbol, those girls (of Benetnash) would definitely move.

“Like I say, we should use a method to pull up a small abuse of the degree that they won’t have to move.”

“Hohou. And how specifically?”

“We could say something like we saw Sylvia pocketing 100 yen that fell on the ground.”

“...Another example?”

“Or something like we saw Sylvia ignoring a red light¹³.”

¹³ here ‘red light’ is meant for traffic; it isn’t the red light you’re thinking about

It looked like it would take 100 years for Sylvia's evaluation to reverse even if they pulled it up.

"Hmm, but, but, I might have quite a good idea."

This time, Monica raised her hand.

"Even if Benetnash moves, it's good as long as they don't find out that it's us who have spread it, right? In that case, how about spreading it through anon in the pro-media club of another academy, kyahah?"

Though appearance wise, Monica was the sweetest and prettiest girl among the members of Rusalka, she also had the nastiest character.

"I see... That said, even those guys wouldn't believe in mere misinformation so easily, right?"

"Fufufu. But, what if it's a genuine material?"

To Monica who complacently smiled, all the members' gazes were tinged with seriousness.

"No way... did you get a hold of such thing?"

"It isn't concrete information, but... there's this shadow around Sylvie recently."

When Monica raised her thumb, Miluše's and Tuulia's faces instantly turned red.

"D-D-D-D-Don't tell me that's...!?"

"A b-b-b-b-boyfriend...!?"

"If I can get the evidence, it'll definitely turn into a big scandal. Even Benetnash won't be able to erase it so easily."

Certainly if it was true, it might become the first — and fatal scandal for Sylvia.

“B-But, is it really true?”

“Who knows? Even Monica¹⁴ only heard by chance the board chairman talking about something like that. Besides, I didn’t hear everything, so I don’t know more than this.”

Monica embraced a bear stuffed toy as she said so. That attitude of hers where she always continually refined her cunningness was to the extent where it would incite respect sometimes.

Miluše who was brooding over something raised her face.

“Speaking of which, she took a break during this school festival, right...?”

“Yes. Since Sylvia-san declined today’s live, we were asked to do it instead.”

“That has nothing to do with it now, right?!”

Though Mahulena just stated a fact, she was intently glared at by the other members.

“Anyway, what is important is to know what she is doing now since she took a break of three days during this event jammed with people.”

“Even you say that, we have no way to investigate privacy. We can’t possibly ask to Benetnash, either.”

“Ugh... t-that’s true, but...”

When Mahulena pointed out so, Miluše’s voice steadily got smaller; but she suddenly raised her head and lightly clapped her hands.

“Ah, that’s right! Then, we should just check it on our own!”

“Eh? C-Check...!”

¹⁴ Monica has the habit to call her own name when talking about herself (like Flora). For those who don’t know already in Japanese culture this is often taken as a cutesy way of talking

"Like I say, we should ourselves investigate whether or not Sylvia really has a b-boyfriend. Tomorrow is a day off for us anyway."

"Eeeeeeeeeeeh!?"

Mahulena unintentionally half-rose to her feet, but the other members were already completely enthusiastic to the idea.

"That's a good idea."

"Interesting! I'm on!"

"Kyahah! Sounds like it'll be fun!"

"W-Wait, everyone...!"

Mahulena somehow tried to remonstrate them, but they turned a deaf ear to it.

"...I think that it'll be more constructive to invest that time to practice though..."

Unrelated to the other members who were excited, Mahulena muttered, half giving up.



School Festival, Second Day.

Ayato was going around Queen Veil Girl's Academy's site led by Sylvia.

"When I look at them like this, be it the school buildings or the atmosphere, the appearance is quite different depending on the academy, as expected."

"Well, yes. Still, I think that the atmosphere here is comparatively similar to that of Seidoukan. Well, as for Garrardsworth, if speaking about orthodox school, I guess that's the one. Conversely, Le Wolfe, World Dragon — and Allekant, which we visited yesterday, are rather quite peculiar."

After having briefly gone around Seidoukan yesterday, they also set their feet to Allekant Academy; but as Sylvia said, it was certainly a peculiar academy.

Seidoukan and Queen Veil were academies which still felt schools-like, but as for Allekant, everything was made for functional importance and overall the mood unique to research institutes was strong.

Perhaps due to that, it was not as crowded compared with Seidoukan and Queen Veil.

“Speaking about the state of congestion, I would say this place is the most crowded at present... oops, sorry.”

Even while saying that, her shoulder hit a person’s who was passing by.

This area was the lakeside in the outskirts of the academy, and although the view was nice, there were no food stalls in particular; and yet it was overflowing with people.

“Well, no matter what you say, this is the secret flower garden after all. It’s a rare opportunity, so isn’t it normal for a person to want to peep if they’re a man, I wonder?”

Sylvia said that as if it was other people’s affairs, but actually Queen’s Veil today was packed with many visiting men. For Ayato it was hard to think that this was a scene of a girl’s school. And what stood out the most was not the tourists from the outside, but the figures of students of other academies.

“It’s good that everyone is so honest.”

Sylvia was chuckling, but she suddenly returned to a serious look and turned a sharp gaze behind.

At the same time, Ayato noticed it, too.

“...Are we being tailed?”

“Looks like it.”

“Is it me...?”

“Hmm... it might be me.”

Someone was clearly following Ayato and Sylvia.

They thought that it might be a fan or a person related to the media who saw through Sylvia’s true identity, but taking that into consideration, they were strangely good at erasing their presence. Perhaps because they realized that Ayato and Sylvia noticed their tailing, they immediately melted into the crowd.

“There doesn’t seem to be bloodlust, but what do we do?”

Ayato had an idea as such, but it looked like it was the same for Sylvia, too.

“It was a long-awaited date, but let’s temporarily part here. Like that, we’ll also understand which of us the target is.”

“Isn’t that dangerous?”

Ayato thought that it was not a bad plan, but separating also meant their force would be divided.

However, Sylvia revealed a wry smile to such words of Ayato.

“Though I’m thankful that you’re worried about me, I may look like this, but I’m the <Lindvolus> runner up, you know?”

“...Ah, that’s right.”

Ayato also smiled wryly as he said that.

If it’s only in theory, Sylvia was the second strongest student in Asterisk.

“Besides, no matter how you look at it, I don’t think they will suddenly launch an attack in a place like this.”

“Well, that’s also true.”

Certainly judging from their presence, they could not feel a dangerous atmosphere.

“The regroup point... how to decide about it? Even if we contact each other at any time, it might be better to go out from the academy depending on the situation. Ayato-kun doesn't know this area very well, right?”

Ayato was about to nod, but he suddenly remembered a certain shop.

“Speaking of which, I've been at a Café close by here before... Ah, here is it.”

As Ayato opened a small space window, he opened the data of the shop which Eishiro has told him about before.

“Oh, I also know this shop, so it's perfect.”

As Sylvia gave a small nod as to say “with this it's settled”, she sent the signal only with her gaze.

Just like that, they headed to the school central part with the most awful congestion and then measuring timing, they parted left and right.

Sylvia went to the right and Ayato to the left.

They accelerated their speed while being careful not to bump into people.

Queen Veil had quite a lot of greenery. Environmentally, Seidoukan also had a similar structure; but if anything, as the ground for parks was man-made, Queen Veil reproduced the groves of trees more naturally(although, since this was a city built on water, there was no doubt that it was artificial).

Ayato, who was advancing along the promenade going through that grove, abruptly stopped.

Because there were very few people in this area, if his pursuer was there, he should be able to sense their presence even if they were a little distant.

“...I wonder if I lost them.”

He surveyed the surrounding for a while, but he did not feel a particularly strange presence.

In that case, “was the aim Sylvia?” he wondered.

“Anyway, I’ll try to contact her...”

As he took out his portable terminal while talking so to himself, he just noticed one girl coming over from the front of the promenade. He squared off for a moment, but there was no particularly suspicious presence.

The relieved Ayato willingly moved aside to give way to her; the girl lightly nodded and went past him.

But when the girl suddenly stopped and looked back for some reason, she fixedly stared at Ayato’s face.

“...Um, is something the matter?”

“.....”

The girl who grew long, glossy black hair wonderingly bent her head slightly to one side.

“...Ayato-san, right?”

“Eh...?”

He unintentionally checked his spectacles and hairstyle, but the disguise was perfect.

“Ah, no, I’m, um...”

Although he was inwardly confused as to how he was found out, as he was searching words how to deceive her—

“It has been a long time. It’s me, Yuzuhi.”

The girl gave her name so and deeply bowed.

“Yuzuhi...?”

At that moment, something was suddenly connected in his head.

“Eeeh!? Yuzuhi-chan of the Yatsuka Dojo!?”

“Yes.”

The black-haired girl — Renjouji Yuzuhi sweetly smiled.

“W-Why are you here...?”

Yuzuhi was a girl who learned archery in the Yatsuka Dojo which acted as a branch family line of the Amagiri Bright Dragon Style.

Among the Amagiri Bright Dragon Styles, the Yatsuka Dojo focused on archery. The archery itself was also transmitted in Ayato’s house which was the main house, but it had long been removed from the required techniques to learn the hidden techniques; so it was necessary to go the Yatsuka Dojo when one seriously wanted to learn archery. Although Ayato has not learned it since his affinity with archery was bad, he had visited the dojo several times along with his big sister when he was young.

He got to know Yuzuhi at that time and often talked with her since they were the same age, but he ceased to go to the dojo after his big sister’s disappearance. Therefore, it has really been a while since they met each other like this.

“Oh, have you not heard from the family head? I have been student of this Queen Veil since last year.”

Yuzuhi pointed to her school badge as she said so.

“...No, sorry. It’s my first time hearing it.”

Ayato scratched his cheek while inwardly cursing his father.

“I have heard about Ayato-san’s achievements. Although belated, congratulations on your <Phoenix> championship. In reality, I should have visited you for greetings, but I thought that it would not be good to become a hindrance...”



Although it was the same when they were children, she was quite a polite child.

“By the way, that is quite an image change. When I saw your figure in the <Phoenix>, you were more like...”

“Ah, that’s— do you have a minute?”

As Ayato surveyed the surroundings, he went off the promenade and entered deep in the grove.

There, he took off his glasses and switched off the hair band.

“How’s this?”

“...I see. So, it was a disguise.”

Yuzuhi greatly nodded as she finally understood.

“Well, it looked like I was immediately found out by Yuzuhi-chan.”

“No, since the way of walking and the carriage were similar to that of the Amagiri Bright Dragon Style, I thought maybe... I was concerned after all; sorry for my impoliteness.”

“As usual, you’ve good eyes...”

Yuzuhi’s good eyesight and her talent in archery had been certified by Ayato’s father.

—Then, Ayato got a contact on his portable terminal.

“Oops... excuse me for a while.”

As he excused himself from Yuzuhi and opened a small space window¹⁵, Sylvia’s noncommittal delicate expression was projected there.

¹⁵ so small that only he could see the image

『Ayato-kun? How is it on your side?』

“Huh? No one came chasing after me, but... did they go your way?”

『Hmm, it's like I expected. No, I sense their presence on the way, but then there has been a slight uproar. It looks like it disappears under cover of it.』

Sylvia who said so looked quite disappointed.

“A slight uproar?”

『Well, I'll tell about it when we join.』

Then, the space window blackout after she said that.

Though Ayato too was not fully satisfied with, it was definitely much better than being dragged into something dangerous.

“Sorry, Yuzuhi-chan. I've a little business. Let's properly talk another time.”

When Ayato said so, Yuzuhi slightly shook her head.

“No, I'm also keeping a friend waiting.”

Like that, they returned to the promenade, bowed to each other and went to opposite directions.

—But, as they were parting.

“Ah, that's right. I must tell you at least this.”

Yuzuhi who stopped turned around while saying that as she recalled something.

“I have heard the rumors, but will you also participate in the <Gryps>, Ayato-san?”

“Ah, yes. That’s right...”

“The truth is that I have also decided to participate.”

“Eh?”

“If we come to fight, I hope that you will not be too hard on me.”

Yuzuhi refreshingly smiled while holding her hair to the wind shaking the grove.

“...Likewise.”

Ayato also returned so after a short while with a wry smile.

“So, what kind of people are your teammates?”

“Well...”

Then after a little thought, Yuzuhi answered somewhat happily.

“They are very fun people.”

As that was indeed an answer that looked like Yuzuhi, Ayato unintentionally burst into laughter.

“Huh? Did I say something weird...?”

“No, sorry. It’s not that. —Well then, let’s both do our best.”

“Yes. Then, I will excuse myself.”

“Yes, take care.”

And this time for sure, he parted with Yuzuhi and went straight through the promenade.

“...Well, if possible, I don’t want to fight her.”

He unintentionally voiced out his true thought.

He did not know how skillful Yuzuhi became now, but he at least knew that she would definitely be quite a troublesome opponent in long-range battle.

The only grace was that Yuzuhi was basically nonathletic.

If she has not overcome it, he would probably defeat her if he brought the battle in a close range one even once.

Of course, that was only if he succeeded in doing so.

“Now then... it should be here, but...”

As he passed through the grove, he came out of the road which continued to the main gate.

As expected there were many food stands around here and the pedestrian traffic was also amazing.

“.....”

Then, Ayato noticed that for some reason many gazes gathered on him.

Not gazes like the one of the people chasing after Sylvia and him a while ago, but purely curious ones.

Among people coming and going, there were also those who stopped and looked at Ayato with surprised expressions. Ayato could also tell that noise was spreading like a small wave.

“U-Um...!”

Before long, one girl stepped out from the crowd and held out her hand with her face bright red. Judging from the Queen Veil’s uniform that she wore, she was probably a student here.

“Y-You’re the <Murakumo> Amagiri Ayato-san, right?! I’m a big fan of yours! C-C-C-Can you please give me a handshake?!”

Then, Ayato finally noticed that he has removed his disguise.

“Ah, no... thank you.”

But it was already late; although Ayato had a cramped face, he could not but hold her hand.

“A-Also, also, if it’s fine with you, can I get an autograph here...?!”

The girl who was holding Ayato’s hand and was buzzingly swaying it nervously took out a pen and note from her bag and hand them to Ayato.

“Ah, please write my name! Errr, Violet here...! Yes, thank you very much!”

The girl who expressed her joy on her whole face left holding the autograph precious.

And—

“Ooh! It’s the real <Murakumo>!”

“U-Um, can I also get an autograph...?!”

“May I take a photo?!”

“Amazing! To think that there will be not only Rusalka, but also the <Murakumo>...!”

It was almost at the same time after the audience which filled the surrounding so far surged towards him like an avalanche that Ayato turned around and escaped.



“...I see, it was really hard on you.”

In a table of the aforementioned Café “Macondo”, Sylvia, did not blame Ayato who was late and consoled him as such.

“I didn’t think that it’ll turn into so big an uproar...”

Although he somehow succeeded in escaping, Ayato who arrived greatly late could only earnestly apologize.

"I've also said it before, but Ayato-kun, I think that you should be a little aware of your popularity. The people who participate in the school festival are all fans of the <Festa>. You know?"

"I'll bear it in mind."

Ayato carried the iced coffee to his mouth as he said so.

As he have finally settled down, he recalled the conversation of a while ago with Sylvia.

"By the way, what was the "slight uproar" you talked about a while ago?"

"Ah, well you could say that it's connected with the conversation just now I guess..."

Then after saying up to there, Sylvia shrugged her shoulders while laughing as it was something fun.

"Sylvie?"

"Fufufu, sorry, sorry... Hey, the children of Rusalka who did a live concert yesterday are here, right? It looks like they were walking around the school without even disguising themselves. Well, it looks like they were hiding, but they were found out in the end."

"Wow... looks like it was hard on them."

Since it also happened to Ayato, if it was the Rusalka which were real stars, it should have been a big uproar.

"It's already been contained. Anyway, the presence of the pursuer disappeared then."

"So that's it..."

If there was such a fuss, the pursuer was probably too preoccupied to think of tailing then.

“Fufufu, geez when it comes to those children...”

Appearing to be laughing with herself, Sylvia’s shoulders were still shaking.

“But on that point, you’re amazing, Sylvie. You’re walking around here and there, and yet you aren’t found out at all.”

If Sylvia’s identity were to be found out, there was no doubt that this school festival would turn into a great tumult as if turning heaven and earth upside down.

“Moreover, I’m with you today... Although at this late hour, will it be all right?”

At least as far as Ayato knew, he has never heard of a scandal about Sylvia that looked like one. Of course, since there was the W&W (Warren and Warren), which is an Integrated Enterprise Foundation, on Sylvia’s back, they would probably smother what little things there were; but even so if for example another Integrated Enterprise Foundation got involved, it would be difficult to smother things.

“Hmm, certainly it might be quite shocking if the fact that I wandered around incognito in the company of a man during the school festival was to be exposed. Depending on the situation it will be bad if we don’t make a vindication interview.”

Though Sylvia spoke in a light tone, for Ayato it was not a laughing matter.

“No, no... isn’t that serious enough a matter.”

“Hahaha, it’s all right. On that point, I’m more experienced than you and those girls’.”

“Experienced?”

“Yes, I’ve already been going out like this since many years, but I’ve never been exposed even once so far.”

In fact, Sylvia’s disguise technique was quite remarkable. Though she basically only wore a hat and changed her hair’s color, she was also good at erasing her presence. Thus, even if Ayato was to be tailed by Sylvia, it would be impossible to guess even for him.

In addition, by going as far as to even change her tone of voice and the atmosphere she wore, one could only say as expected to the fact that she could become a different person entirely.

“Still, it isn’t like it’ll be 100% all right, is it?”

“I’ll deal with it then. I may also retire if needed.”

“Heeh, retire, huh... wait, eehh!?”

Since she said it too lightly, Ayato has almost ignored it, but she dropped a f*cking bombshell.

“I only chose this position because I’m able to have as many people as possible in our current society hear my songs. No matter what the form, there will be no meaning if it doesn’t first reach somebody after all.”

Certainly, the <Festa> was the world’s largest entertainment presently; there was no better stage than it if you were going to transmit something;

But — could one fight with that alone?

As that was reflected on her face, Sylvia continued as to supplement.

“Of course, there is another reason. First of all, I want to become strong.”

“...I think you’re strong enough even now though.”

“Hahaha, thank you. But, when I say strong, it doesn’t only mean purely the power to fight; I say it in a wider meaning. I want to become a strong

person including everything such as the heart and position. To that end, I must cultivate my character by studying hard.”

What a really stoic speech.

“Anyway, there are many things that a strong people can do, right? Then, my choices will increase and I will also be able to help somebody. —The old me wasn’t able to do anything after all.”

“Eh...?”

Those last words which she said in a small voice as to add, Ayato wondered what on earth they meant.

But before he could ask that, Sylvia continued talking.

“However, I’m feeling the worth of being in this position, but it isn’t like I’m attached to it. If it’s only to deliver my songs, there are many other ways; and besides there are also things I want to do.”

“Things you want to do?”

Then, Sylvia’s pupils suddenly wore a serious color.

“Hey, Ayato-kun. Since it’s a rare opportunity, may I also ask you a question?”

“Eh? Yes, I don’t mind...”

“—Is it true that your big sister was found?”

“!”

At these words, Ayato’s expression became tense.

Basically nobody other than people related should know about Haruka. His wish at the time of the <Phoenix> victory was not publicly disclosed, either.

“...Why do you know that?”

"I may look like this, but I'm a student council president, you know? I've access to information to some extent. For example, the newest one is that — your big sister is sleeping in a hospital."

"...So you know to that extent."

Ayato also could not help but turn a sharp gaze.

But, Sylvia who heard it relaxed with a deep sigh.

"I see... it's true after all."

Leaning her back of the back of the chair as is, she looked up at the ceiling for a while.

"Sorry, Ayato-kun. For suddenly asking you something strange."

Sylvia who turned around to Ayato before long returned to her usual smile.

As he saw it, Ayato also released his tension.

"What pushed you to ask me that?"

"Well, actually it'd have better to have talk about it in order, but it's slightly complicated."

When Sylvia said that, she put the coffee, which has probably completely cooled down, into her mouth.

"...The truth is, I'm also looking for someone."

"Someone...? No, but..."

In the first place when Ayato was searching for Flora who was kidnapped, Silvia was the one who found out her location. In that case, would it not be possible either way to manage to find the person she was looking for with that power?

As such a thought was reflected on his face, Sylvia revealed a bitter smile.

“Even if I have detection type ability, it doesn’t mean that I can find out whatever I like. For example, it’s useless if I can’t narrow down the range to some extent. After all, generally the amount of prana consumed changes depending on the target range.”

“I see... So then, it’s impossible to search a person with just knowing the fact that they should be somewhere in this world.”

“Even an excellent detection ability user will immediately run out of prana if they were to do something like that.”

Sylvia shrugged her shoulders as she said so.

“Besides, I think you know it, but it’s possible to make the detection type ability ineffective if one spends money and prepares appropriate equipments. In this Asterisk, each academy’s central department, main buildings of administrative areas, hospitals, VIP rooms of first-class hotels are flawless on that area.”

“Then as expected, you’ve already tried your ability and it didn’t work, right?”

“Hmm, I can’t say whether or not it did work, but...”

Sylvia’s answer was not quite clear.

“Because I was originally thinking that that person might be in this Asterisk, I had no problem for the range — and as a result, there was a reaction, too.”

“In that case...”

As if interrupting the next lines of Ayato’s words, Sylvia shook her head.

“No matter what, I can’t narrow down from that point. There’s no mistaking that they’re definitively in this Asterisk, but I couldn’t find out exactly where they are...”

From her tone, it seemed that it was the first time so far that Sylvia got a vague result when using her detention ability.

“In that case, you had no choice but to gather information and search on foot, huh... Ah, then is it what you were doing also at that time?”

It was in the Entertainment District of the Redevelopment Area that Ayato and Sylvia met for the first time.

He has always wondered why a world’s diva was in such a place alone, but if she was looking for someone, then it made sense.

No, perhaps as for the date itself in this school festival, the real purpose might be to search that someone.

“Yes. When I have free time, I’m looking for them by myself like that. After all, the Redevelopment Area is the most likely place.”

“Likely?”

As he asked back so, Sylvia replied after a little pause.

“...The person I’m looking for seemed to have participated in the <Eclipse>.”

“—”

So that was it.

But if she knew up to the fact that Haruka has participated in the <Eclipse>, then it meant that Queen Veil’s Intelligence organization was quite excellent.

“So if your big sister has been found out, then I thought that maybe you might have heard something about it...”

“I see.”

If so, then she might have surely become dejected hearing that Haruka was still asleep as is.

“Even I’ve almost no information regarding the <Eclipse>... Ah, but don’t misunderstand. It isn’t really like I’ve approached you with that purpose in mind.”

“Hahaha, I know.”

In the first place at the time of their encounter, it was impossible to intentionally plan to get in contact with Ayato there.

“After having met you for the first time, I checked a little about you, Ayato-kun. And then, I discovered that you were looking for your big sister, so I felt a little sympathy for you.”

Sylvia said that, unusually embarrassed.

“Ah, may I ask you one thing?”

“Yes.”

“Um, who is the person you’re looking for...?”

If she was going to such length to looking for that person, it meant that they were a very important person. Judging from her way of talking, it did not look like she was looking for a blood relative like Ayato.

Which meant—

“Fufufu, are you interested? But Ayato-kun, what you’re imagining is probably wrong. The person I’m looking for is a woman after all.”¹⁶

Sylvia loosened her lips teasingly.

“...The person I’m looking for is my master.”

“Master?”

¹⁶ she specified a “woman” because she guessed that Ayato was thinking maybe it was her lover/boyfriend or something she was looking for

“Yes. The master who taught me about songs and about the world.”

Sylvia softly put her hand on her chest as she said so.

From her words, one could feel that Sylvia really thought strongly about that person.

“I got it. When my big sister wakes up I’ll tell you so that you may ask her directly about your master.”

“...Yes. Thank you, Ayato-kun.”

Sylvia, who smiled as she was relieved, revealed the face of a woman appropriate for her age for the first time.

“Well then, now that I’m feeling refreshed, shall we go the next academy?”

“Errr... it was Garrardsworth in the plan, right? But, do you want to go already?”

“I can’t waste my precious days off after all.”

“How strong of you...”

While saying so, Ayato also drank up his remaining iced coffee.

He felt like he has somehow grasped the girl called Sylvia Lyyneheym.

But, as expected he could feel that there were still many things he did not know about her.



“Sigh, geez being popular is really troublesome... Hahahaha~...”

When saying so, Miluše collapsed on the sofa on her own room as she was completely exhausted.

Contrary to her words, her tone was weak without peer.

No matter how unboundedly cheerful a Rusalka member she was, she would become like this if she suddenly continued to receive handshakes and autograph attacks during several hours

Similarly, Mahulena too had no even energy to stand up as she has sunk down on the floor.

“Geez, our precious day off ended with a surprise autograph session. Whose fault is it~?”

Though Monica became sullen while flapping her feet on the bed, it was as to wonder whether or not she remembered that her suggestion was the trigger.

“Well since we succeeded in our tailing, it’s fine though.”

As she fell on her face on the table, Tuulia also said that with a groan.

Because Sylvia’s room was diagonally opposite to Miluše’s room, they alternately monitored from the door gap (of Miluše’s room) for several hours for Sylvia to secretly go out.

All was going well until they tailed Sylvia who went out in disguise, but because they prepared in a hurry, they had almost no time to disguise themselves properly.

Even so for the members of Rusalka, everyone except Mahulena was students at the level of up-and-coming students. They could erase their presence without problem.

Usually, they would not have been found out so easily.

If there was a cause for their failure—

“We shouldn’t have acted with everyone after all.”

It would be these words that Päivi said.

No matter how disguised and good at erasing their presence they were, if they acted with five people together, they would stand out whether they liked it or not.

In the end, although they suddenly appeared after having seemingly noticed and tried to give the stalker the slip, it didn't help since they were discovered by a fan. If it was during work then they could cope with having a guard follow them but, it was a calamity since they were unfortunately off work.

If they were one or two fans, the girls might have been able to deceive and deal with them, but there was nothing to do since they were surrounded by dozens of people

"That said!"

Miluše who suddenly stand on the sofa as she already recovered raised her voice.

"There was a proper harvest¹⁷! It is a big win!"

"Certainly, to think that she was really on a d-d-d-date with a man..."

Mahulena was also surprised at it.

She never thought that Sylvia, no matter how well disguised she was, would openly be on a date in a broad daylight in the middle of such crowd.

"But, it's a shame that we weren't able to know who her partner was."

"You're right. We only took photos from behind, too; so his face was not captured on any of them."

Because they carefully acted so as to avoid being noticed by Sylvia, they were not able to get a hold of any clear evidence. Like this, even if they

¹⁷ basically the plan was a success

informed this on any type of media, there was nothing they could gain from it.

“But judging from her partner’s carriage or atmosphere, he looks quite skillful. So if we investigate a little more, we will definitely find a clue...”

“—Ah, excuse me for a bit.”

When Miluše spoke up to there, Mahulena received a call on her portable terminal.

The window space which she unfolded was pitch black — it was a voice communication.

Just then, tension ran between the members.

All the members guessed who the other party was.

『Mahulena, it looks like you have enjoyed your day off.』

“Y-Yes, Board Chairman!”

『That’s very good. Ah, the other members are also there, right? In that case, please tell all of them to come to me at once within five minutes and explain the reason why they caused such unavailing racket without notice.』

“R-Roger...!”

Although the communication was cut after such a short conversation, its effect was tremendous.

“U-Uwaaaaaaaaaaaaah! S-She found out! Why, how did she found out!?”

“...No, with that much of a racket, it’ll naturally reach the board chairman’s ears, right?”

“Sigh, another scolding, huh”

“It’ll be good if it ends just with that though.”

Monica and Päivi have already given up.

“Uhuhuhu...! All of this was that girl’s fault! I won’t forgive you, Sylvia Lyyneheym!”

It was fine to have a completely unjust resentment, but speaking it out was useless.

As Mahulena sighed once, she wracked her brain in order to make up an excuse to at least lighten the number one blame as much as possible.

Chapter 5 – School Festival Rhapsody III

St. Garrardsworth Academy, Student Council Room.

“—That’s all for today’s reports.”

“Yes, this year looks quite prosperous as well.”

Ernest Fairclough who crossed his fingers on the ebony work desk calmly nodded as he received various reports of the school festival.

“For the moment, there isn’t any conspicuous trouble in particular, so it’s something good I guess.”

Laetitia who was sitting on the sofa also heaved a sigh of relief for the time being.

Garrardsworth always valued order and justice, but because outsiders were involved when it came to school festival, troubles occurring were more or less inevitable.

Speaking on that point, it might be said the school festival was quite peaceful this year.

“However, I am envious of Allekant and Queen Veil only at this time every year.”

Laetitia said so and rubbed her shoulders.

Generally, all the student councils of Asterisk were thought as if they owned a mighty power, but it was substantially Garrardsworth and Seidoukan who managed everything up to administration of school events.

In Allekant where factionalism was prevalent, the student council was no more than a coordinator; and in Queen Veil, the board chairman held real power and the student council could be considered close to decoration. World Dragon varied depending on the period, but if we looked historically, there should be many student councils which entrusted the Integrated Enterprise Foundation with the business side.

It should have originally been the same for Le Wolfe too, but it changed completely after that Dirk Eberwein reached the seat of student council president. That said, because it seemed that most of the members of the student council gathered by Dirk were staff recruited from the Integrated Enterprise Foundation, it would be hard to speak of administration by students purely.

Of course, it was not like the student councils of Garrardsworth and Seidoukan were independent from the Integrated Enterprise Foundation; they also borrowed the IEF’s power, but compared with other academies, it should be said that they did so with great discretion.

“We only carry out our duty, Laetitia. The outside also carries out theirs, and they should also be having different problems of their own.”

“That’s true, but...”

Even so, she still wanted to spill even one idle complaint.

After all, it was already time that you might say that it was midnight, and yet work that they must settle by today was still remaining.

“By the way speaking of Queen Veil, how did the matter of letting Sofia-san participate in the <Gryps> turn out?”

“Who knows? I didn’t hear anything in particular, but... Sofia isn’t a child anymore, so I don’t have the right to interfere in what she decided by herself.”

“You have a point, but...”

Sofia Fairclough was Ernest’s younger sister who attended Queen Veil Girl’s Academy.

Although Sofia was younger, Laetitia was greatly influenced by her.

That’s why she was worried.

From a certain accident which occurred in childhood, Sofia bore a fatal trauma which appeared in the <Festa>. When Sofia started talking about coming to Asterisk, Laetitia was strongly opposed to it.

But even though Ernest, her big brother, said this, Laetitia, an outsider, could not afford to interfere.

“Ah, speaking of which——”

The student council secretary Percival Gardner who read out the reports said as she recalled something.

Percival, though dressed in a male uniform, was a full-fledged girl and a true knight ranked #5. In further speaking, she was also the user of a Garrardsworth’s scholarship ogre lux — <Drill Horn of Atonement (Goat Amaltheia)>¹⁸, also known as <Holy Grail>; the last time it was used before her was twenty years ago.

¹⁸ I could be wrong but I believe this is reference to the Cornucopia which, in Greek mythology, was in possession of the goddess who nourished Zeus as a child (when he was hidden from Kronos), Amaltheia. - Yascob

"Today, I caught sight of Her Excellency the Student Council President of Queen Veil."

"The <Melodious Witch> is here?"

It was their first time hearing it. Which meant that she entered incognito.

"Yes, since she was disguised, it looked like no one else noticed her."

"Hmph, how carefree of her."

While saying that, Laetitia drank the tea that she newly served.

Since the site was opened during the period of the school festival, the comings and goings were free even for a student council president of another academy. For example, if this was Le Wolfe student council president, they would have to be careful about what he is plotting; but if the other party was that Sylvia Lyyneheyme, there was no need to be so worried.

But.

"Also, she was accompanied by one person. He was also in disguise, but I think that it was probably Seidoukan Academy's <Murakumo>."

"Bufuh!?"

At these words, Laetitia was about to spurt out tea unintentionally.

"<M-Murakumo> and the <Melodious Witch> came here together, you said...?"

"Yes."

Percival answered indifferently.

Although she had no idea at all about what kind of connection there were between them, the combination of Seidoukan Academy's rank #1 and <Phoenix> winner, and the rank #1 who was also Queen Veil

student council president and the <Lindvolus> runner-up was not ordinary.

“Ernest, what do you think?”

“Hmm... I can't really guess their intention.”

“May we assume that it's the inspection of the enemy's position towards the <Gryps>...?”

Laetitia put a finger on her chin and pondered.

It was believed that Amagiri Ayato also known as <Murakumo> was participating in the <Gryps> and it was all but confirmed. In that case, it would be no wonder that he came to investigate the top favorite on the list, the Silver Wings Knights, which at present had won the <Gryps> twice consecutively.

As for Sylvia, she was considered to be the <Lindvolus>'s favorite, but Rusalka which was a major contender also from Queen Veil should appear in the <Gryps>.

“...Hmm”

Then, Ernest folded his arms and thinly laughed.

It was not his usual perfect smile; although just a little, a part of the true nature of the human called Ernest Fairclough could be glimpsed in there.

“In any case, it's a shame that they didn't even greet us even though they have expressly come here.”

“Ernest...?”

It was probably not a groundless that Laetitia had a bad feeling about his expression

“It’s just the right time. It was a little unbearable to decline an invitation from the princess¹⁹.”

“P-Please wait a little! Don’t tell me you intend to participate in that event!?”

“If I’m not mistaken, he has been invited to take part as a guest participant, right? Isn’t this a good opportunity to ascertain with my own eyes what kind of person he is?”

Though she hurriedly stopped him, Ernest seemed to have already decided.

“Percival, can’t we rotate a part of tomorrow’s work load into today to pick up on it? I will settle it.”

“Understood.”

Ignoring Percival who answered indifferently, Laetitia approached Ernest.

“Ernest! If you do something so self-centered, the <Holy Sword> will...!”

“It’s all right, Laetitia. This isn’t out of selfishness; it’s an action which carefully considers this academy after all.”

“B-But, in the worst case...”

Now that Ernest asserted so, Laetitia’s tone could not also help but become weak.

In Garrardsworth’s history, the number of persons who were acknowledged by <Lei-Glems> and given the nickname of <Holy Knight> exceeded 20, but it was said that Ernest had the best affinity with <Lei-Glems> even among them.

¹⁹ guess he’s speaking here about Fan XingLu ()

No, more exactly rather than affinity, the way he got along with it was good.

<Lei-Glems>'s prize was to be always noble-minded and wanting to be the agent of justice and order — however, that “justice” was to the bitter end only something that <Lei-Glems> determined. Although it closely resembled — though partially — ethic morality as chivalry and the common societal ideas of the Middle Ages, it was just called so.

To someone who could not cover up that estrangement, it was difficult to handle.

On that point, Ernest was an owner of natural talents who understood <Lei-Glems>'s intention and could accommodate his own actions to some extent.

“You don’t be so worried, I won’t overdo it. Besides, even leaving him aside, I’m a little concerned about this event.”

“Well... The cooperation of three academies and moreover an event of this scale are certainly rare.”

“Of course, there is that too, but... although working behind the scenes, it’s rare for the princess to appear outside of World Dragon.”

“Are you saying that that child is plotting something?”

Ernest, lost in thought with a serious expression as is, did answer to Laetitia’s inquiry.



“...Casino? The whole academy?”

“Yes. It’s the custom of Le Wolfe’s school festival every year.”

School Festival, third day.

Ayato who had made his way over to Le Wolfe Black Institute was, as expected, amazed as he saw that scene.

The academy's structure itself leant itself back to a boorish, coercive fortress, but now it was gaudily decorated and there was no doubt it had become the most suspicious thing in this world.

"Well, Le Wolfe's students aren't proactive enough to voluntarily do something in this sort of event after all. Officially, it's the academy side which organizes this, but it looks like the organization is mostly left to the care of the Entertainment District."

"Ah, that's why the atmosphere resembles that place's, huh..."

Even they were visiting like this, there was clearly less people here than in others academies.

Just for note, there were also food stands lining up, but the price setting was quite bullish. On top of that, every one of the shop assistants came with frightening look. Colorful graffiti and obscene scribbles were painted here and there on the walls, and like this it would probably be difficult for ordinary tourists to approach.

Even so, the casinos in themselves seemed to earn quite a lot of success.

When sneaking a look at a place like an arena, slot machines lined up in a row, roulettes, baccarat and blackjack tables and the likes were all standard-made. The black-suit male staff and the female waitresses in bunny girl uniforms were busily moving around that hall where a quiet enthusiasm was acutely transmitted.

"Do you want to go play for a bit?"

"No, I'll pass. I'm not good at gambling."

To Sylvia who had said that jokingly, Ayato showed restraint with a vague smile.

"You certainly don't look so strong... wait, oh my."

Sylvia shook her shoulders as she said so, but she suddenly lowered her eyebrows unhappily.

As Ayato looked ahead of her gaze, one girl carrying drinks was going to grandly fall down as she tripped.

“Hey hey, young girl, give me some room. It’s already the fifth time, you know?”

The black-suited staff man who obviously did not seem to be a student squatted before that girl with an amazed expression.

“Uuh... I’m sorry.”

“It’s the president who introduces you, so I don’t want to say too much. But young girl, don’t you think that you aren’t suited for this job? No, it’s true that we’re shorthanded, but...”

“B-But, this is also an important job that the president away on business trip instructs me to do, so I must do it properly as his secretary!”

To the girl’s admirable appeal, the black-suited staff man scratched his head with a quite troubled face.

“That girl, I think I’ve already seen her somewhere...”

“Oh, an acquaintance?”

“Errr... oh yes, it’s the girl who presented herself as the <Tyrant>’s secretary.”

Then, Sylvia opened her eyes wide in surprise.

“Then, perhaps that girl is Kashimaru Corona?”

“Ah, I think it was her name. Is she famous?”

As he asked conversely, Sylvia nodded with a noncommittal expression.

“Rather than famous, I would say there are many mysteries about her... Dirk Eberwein is famous in the fact that he only evaluates others by their ability, but when he suddenly selected a freshman as his secretary, rumors spread around at one time about whether she was an

extraordinarily talented person. She hardly appears in public, so I was curious about what kind of person she really is.”

“An extraordinarily talented person, huh...”

Though it might appear to be rude, Ayato thought that such a reputation did not really seem to stand as he looked at that figure of hers repeatedly bowing her head to the black-suited staff man.

Even when Ayato remembered about the time when she came to pick him before, she gave the same impression at that time.

“But, she certainly isn’t really like a student of Le Wolfe”

“I agree. But then, why did that <Tyrant> appoint her as secretary...?”

Then, Sylvia suddenly pulled Ayato’s arm and took him outside of the arena.

“...Didn’t you stare a little too much? Let’s withdraw before appearing suspicious.”

Now that she mentioned it, several back-suited staff men seemed to have begun to firmly pay attention to Ayato who had stopped on his track.

Sylvia appeared to be sensitive about that.

“Haa... this is why I don’t like Le Wolfe.”

Sylvia who went outside sighed in dissatisfaction before long.

“Well, since it’s a casino, I think there is no helping it that they keep a watchful eye on people.”

“Even aside of that, I can’t really relax in Le Wolfe. If a girl is here by herself, weird people will immediately call out to (accost) her.”

As Sylvia said up to there, she twined around her arm around Ayato’s.

“Since Ayato-kun is with me today, I don’t have to worry about that.”

“Hahaha... I am honored to be able to help, but um, I don’t think it necessary to cling too much to each other...”

“Now then, let’s go take lunch. Although slightly early, we must still go to World Dragon, too and there is also Ayato-kun’s event in the evening.”

Smoothly warding off Ayato’s words, Sylvia looked around restlessly.

“Hmm, if we take it here, it’ll be overpriced... That said, even if we entered any shop, they’ll be mostly full... Hmm?”

“Oh...?”

They noticed a delicious smell drifting suddenly out of nowhere.

When they went being induced by that smell, there was a large street stall at a corner like a courtyard and simple chairs and tables were lined up at the storefront.

“Welcome~, would you like to have some Paella ^{20~?}”

A girl in a lovely apron figure was calling out them as potential customers, that girl was also someone that became acquainted with.

“Huh? Priscilla-san?”

Though he unintentionally called out to her so, Priscilla looked back at Ayato with a blank face.

Next to him, Sylvia said “Geez, Ayato-kun...” in a low voice as she was amazed; then Ayato noticed that he completely forgot that he disguised himself.

“Um, I’m sorry. Have we already met somewhere...?”

²⁰ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paella>

“Ah, errr...”

Not knowing what to do now, Ayato averted his gaze at least; but Priscilla who fixedly stared at his face held her mouth in surprise before long.

“Eh? Don’t tell me you’re Amagiri-san...!?”

However as she guessed the meaning of the disguise, she hurriedly lowered the volume of her voice.

“Hahaha... Long time no see.”

“Yes. There seemed to have been a lot of troubles in the <Phoenix>, but Congratulations on your victory.”

Priscilla said so with an honest smile denuded of malice.

“Thank you. Also it’s a little late to express my gratitude, but thank you for the delicious sandwich at that time.”

“No, it wasn’t much... Compared to what Amagiri-san did for me, that much was natural...”

Priscilla lowered her eyes as she was embarrassed.

By “meal of that time”, Ayato was talking about the light meal that was given through Irene at the time when he was looking for Flora. Since he was in hurry and thus was not able to properly give his thanks afterwards, he thought that this was a good opportunity to say it.

“Ah, that’s right. If it’s fine with you, please come by. I can’t give you that great things, but...”

“Is perhaps Priscilla-san’s handmade cooking done here?”

“Well, yes.”

In that case, the taste was guaranteed.

As he turned his gaze, Sylvia who looking at Ayato and Priscilla's exchange one step back lightly nodded, too.

"Yes, I don't mind, either. Judging from the smell, it looks delicious."

"Um, Amagiri-san. This person is...?"

Priscilla wonderingly asked so as she looked at Sylvia's school badge.

As expected, it looked like even Priscilla was not able to find out Sylvia's true identity.

"Fufufu, hello. We are currently on date."

When Ayato was wondering how he should introduce her, Sylvia said so with a teasing smile.

"Eeeh!? I-I'm sorry...! For interfering...!"

The face of Priscilla who heard that turned bright red and she buzzingly waved both her hands.

"U-Um, I'll bring the menu now! P-P-Please take a seat of your choice...!"

Then she went inside the stall as if running away.

"...Sylvie"

"Oh my, it's not a lie, is it?"

"That's true, but..."

When Ayato said so as to blame her, Sylvia apologized with a wry smile as she thought that she was at fault.

"I'm sorry. I didn't think that she'd return such a lovely reaction... Such purity (innocence) is rare nowadays. I might be a little envious."

"You speak as if you aren't the same."

Maybe because it was still early, half of the tables were free.

When they properly secured a seat and sat down, Sylvia sighed exaggeratedly.

“When you’re in this industry, you also see various unpleasant parts of people after all. Besides, although mostly a decoration, I’m also a student council president; I can’t deny it no matter what...”

“I wonder about that. I think that you’re a remarkably straightforward and honest girl though, Sylvie.”

“.....”

As for Ayato, he has only conveyed what he honestly thought, but Sylvia revealed a surprised expression for an instant, and then subtly averted her gaze.

“Hey Ayato-kun, you really like throwing curve balls with such unfair timings, don’t you...”

“Eh?”

“S-Sorry to have kept you waiting, here is the menu.”

As Ayato was about to ask as he could not quite catch the intention of Sylvia’s words, Priscilla, with her face still slightly red, came over with the menu.

“Ah, yes. Errr, then...”

For the time being, he decided to properly choose something and ordered it.

“Speaking of which, Irene isn’t together with you.”

“Hahaha... I think Onee-chan is probably in the casino.”

As he casually asked so, Priscilla shrugged her shoulders with a troubled face.

"Ah, but she's told me that she will participate in that event from the evening. The one where Amagiri-san is also registered as a guest."

"Eeh, Irene, too?"

"She said that there seems to be a reward of considerable amount."

Speaking of which, he was not that much interested in it, but he remembered Eishiro saying that the event's prize was fairly extravagant.

"She's the same as usual."

Then, Ayato noticed a certain thing.

"...Huh? Priscilla-san, are you perhaps training?"

"Eh? C-Can you tell...?"

Priscilla held her mouth in surprise.

"Yes, the way you walk is different from before and your trunk also looks much firmer after all."

"Yes. The truth is, I train myself and Onee-chan also teaches a lot of things. I thought that I can't have Onee-chan protect me forever."

"Heeh, that's admirable."

As he praised her so, Priscilla blushed with her head hung down.

"I-I was invited by Onee-chan to participate in the event so as to test my ability, but as expected I'm still a little scared."

"We don't know what kind of event it'll be, so I think you made a wise decision."

At least It wasn't supposed to be a beginner grand welcome.

"I'll cheer for both Onee-chan and Amagiri-san, so please do your best."

Priscilla said so with an embarrassed grin and then returned to the stall.

After seeing her off, Ayato noticed that Sylvia was looking at him with a face as she seemed to want to say something.

“Hmm...”

“W-What is it?”

“No, I was just thinking that it’s a good thing for you to have a fan that will come cheer you.”

“Are you one to talk?”

She probably had so many fans to the extent that it would not be comparable with Ayato’s.

“That girl is slightly different from my fans, right?”

“Eh? Do you think so?”

“Yes.”

Sylvia took a small breath with an amazed expression.

Then, the dishes they ordered came before long.

“Oh, is it Basque style²¹? Looks delicious.”

Since it was exquisite when they were treated in Irene’s room, he ordered the recommended Paella this time, too; but the ingredients and smell were quite different from then.

When they ate a mouthful, it was, without fail, delicious as expected.

Sylvia also seeming to like it, her face revealed a beautiful, broad smile.

“Mmm... this is great. To the extent that I might want her to tell me the recipe.”

²¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Basque_cuisine

“Heeh, Sylvie can even cook?”

“Why do you ask it with a face as if it was unexpected...? Even idols can at least cook, you know?”

“Sorry, sorry, that’s not what I mean; look, Sylvie looks busy after all.”

To Sylvie who pouted, Ayato hurriedly apologized as she waved both his hands.

“Well, I certainly haven’t contacted anyone recently, but... Ah!”

“W-What’s wrong?”

As Ayato asked while blinking with surprise, Sylvia rested her chin in her hand with a face saying “oops”.

“No. If today wasn’t the last day, I thought that I’d have made a bento tomorrow.”

“Hahaha, it’s a shame.”

“Well, never mind. Let’s leave it aside for the enjoyment next time.”

“...Next?”

As Ayato unintentionally inquired to Sylvia, who smiled teasingly with upturned eyes.



Today as well Julis was in a foul mood since morning.

It was the extent that she felt so by herself, so it was probably apparent from another person’s viewpoint.

Along the way to the training room, seeing the figure of Julis, who was now a celebrity, the general visitors who were about to call out to her increased in number as it is; but they all stopped halfway.

Even though it was supposed to be immensely wonderful without any trouble, it was also irritating now for some reason.

“Ah... Good morning, Julis-senpai.”

“Geez, it’ll be good if the school festival just ends quickly.”

When she entered to the training room, Kirin who was doing individual training bowed her head; but Julis suddenly spat out so.

But, she immediately came to her senses and frankly apologized.

“—No, sorry Kirin. It’s just not going well.”

“No, it’s all right. I agree, too.”

Kirin understood the cause of Julis’s irritation.

It was irritating to frankly admit it, but the fact that Ayato and Sylvia were acting together for the entire the school festival was the reason.

Of course, with whom, where and what Ayato did at his free time was his own convenience. Julis had no right to butt in.

But even if she thought so and intended to calm her heart, it did not quite go well.

(Sylvia Lyyneheyme, huh...)

Needless to say, Sylvia was the highest ranked influential person in the present Asterisk. In fact, she always had her name entered in the top ten ranking even in the “Poem’s Mead (Odolelilu)” and “Six Sided Temple (Hex Pantheon)” which were unofficial ranking sites on the net

Even the matter with Ayato aside, Julis had paid attention to Sylvia since long ago.

This was because Sylvia was current the only student — at least as far as Julis knew — to have put up a good fight against that Orphelia as an opponent. As for the match contents, it was quite one-sided, but though

temporary, Sylvia was able to deal with the ability of Orphelia. Julis who knew Orphelia's power from experience understood how much astounding that was.

And even if they have not met directly, Julis could have a rough guess of her personality when seeing that match progressing.

Unfortunately, Sylvia's fighting style was a desirable thing even judging from Julis. She showed respect to her match opponent and clashed with them head on without thoughtlessly using a plan — Julis did not know whether it was because of Sylvia's versatile ability and capability, but she could not help admire the fact that she carried through with it even with that Orphelia as opponent.

What was derived from that was that the person called Sylvia had a character which plotted and led people into traps—

(In other words, she invited Ayato from pure good will...)

Thinking up to there, Julis was greatly perplexed as she slightly groaned.

"J- Julis-senpai...?"

Kirin who was surprised at the sudden lack of responsiveness timidly called out to her, but it did not reach the ears of Julis who was lost in thought.

(No matter how blockheaded he is, the other party is a world's diva and matchless top idol... in that case...)

"Um, are you all right? Julis-senpai?"

"Ah, no, I'm all right. There's no problem!"

Julis who suddenly came to her senses as Kirin's hand touched her shoulders cleared her throat so as to deny it and stood up.

"By the way, um... that. Saya doesn't come today, either?"

“Y-Yes... looks like it. She seemed to have participated in the swimming club’s event, but...”

“Yes, it seemed that she has rampaged there.”

Saya was probably venting her anger in her own way.

“A friend from the swimming club was lamenting the fact that they were troubled because she used it for letting out stress.”

Julis noticed that Kirin, who smiled wryly so, was not also that much enthused in her training recently.

—In fact.

“By the way, Kirin.”

“Yes, what is it?”

“It’s a little hard to say, but... your shoes are on the wrong feet.”

“Eh?”

“Also, your ribbon isn’t properly tied.”

“Eeh!?”

“Since your hair style is also loose, the right side is about to come loose.”

“Aww...!”

As Julis pointed out all of these, Kirin crouched down on the verge of tears.

As Julis lightly sighed, she went behind such Kirin and combed her hair.

“There, let me see. I’ll fix your hair at least.”

“T-Thank you... Julis-senpai.”

“Well, Saya’s way may seem to be more correct compared to us who are accumulating our stress.”

“Yes... but”

To Julis’s words, Kirin continued while slightly nodding.

“It looks like she ended up being forbidden to enter in the event of the swimming club because of that, so where will she go today? There are also other attractive events this year... she might have gone to the other academies, right?”



“No, considering her poor sense of direction, it’s hard to think that she went that far... hmm?”

At that timing, the training room door opened.

“Hou, speaking of the devil”

Having appeared was Saya with a somewhat sullen face.

Moreover from behind her, Claudia also entered with a smile.

“Ah, we thought the same thing. It’s just the right timing.”

“What, Claudia? Is your work over?”

“Yes, I somehow manage a part to the end. So since it’s a rare opportunity, I intend to go see that event and I have just invited Sasamiya-san. If you are fine with it, why don’t we go together?”

Claudia said so and joined both her hands.

“When you say that event, are you talking about the one organized by three academies joint where Ayato-senpai will also participate?”

“Yes, that one. But the club associations of each academy are the leadership in this event, so we, as student council, have basically no hand in it. Of course, we were at least told about the outline.”

“.....”

Since Ayato participated, of course it was not like Julis did not think about it, too.

But, it was also difficult to say whether she could frankly cheer for Ayato with the present state of her feelings,

(It isn’t really like I’m sulking. It by no means really like I’m sulking, but...)

Then, as if she read Julis’s heart, Claudia said while giggling.

“Among the participants, there also seems to be those who will participate in the <Gryps>, so I think it can also serve as information gathering.”

It was clearly understood whom that was directed to; but when being said so, it would be difficult to decline.

“... You’re an unpleasant woman as usual.”

“Now, what are you talking about?”

As Claudia replied sarcastically, she feigned ignorance with a face that expressed that nothing had happened.



The appearance (exterior) of World Dragon Seventh Institute was the most characteristic among the six academies of Asterisk.

Chinese-style buildings filled up the entire site and all of them are connected by corridors just like a labyrinth. Between two buildings were dotted with elegant gardens and huge open spaces, to the extent that one was likely not to know where they were without a map.

“This is really amazing... I wonder if this place isn’t the liveliest.”

While being surprised at the liveliness, Ayato talked to Sylvia walking beside him.

“Though there is also the fact that it’s the academy with the greatest number of students, the school tradition in World Dragon is slightly different from the other schools after all.”

“School tradition?”

“Hmm... I don’t know whether I should say that it’s chaotic or that there is freedom... Traditionally, the Integrated Enterprise Foundation’s influence isn’t so great here.”

When sending their eyes to a slightly large open space, several people were dancing while manipulating a huge dragon's doll and people were crowded around them. In the garden on the opposite side, a giant (tall man) with knives was doing acrobatics and was bathing in cheers.

"Do you mean that the students' independence is respected?"

"That's not it; there seem to be many students choosing World Dragon with the purpose of training themselves. For them, even regarding the <Festa>, the champion is secondary and the meaning of testing their ability is stronger. That's why it may be hard for the Integrated Enterprise Foundation to lure them with bait."

"Ah, in other words the <Festa> is only a process of their training to the bitter end and they don't necessarily have a wish that they want granted."

He remembered Song and Luo that he fought in the <Phoenix>.

Those two were certainly students of that kind. If their own training itself was their purpose, he could also understand that the Fist Warriors of World Dragon were strong.

"Of course, there are many such people; but those who enter World Dragon with some dream aren't few in number, either."

Maybe they were firecrackers', lively sounds echoed here and there, and lively tones (timbres) were always flowing from somewhere. Because World Dragon was the only academy among the six that had an elementary division, figures of children running around happily could also be seen.

"Also for better or worse, that there is no unity as an academy is partly the reason, too. After all in World Dragon various branch factions are jumbled up close together and each of them is independent."

"But, it's also the same for Allekant, isn't it?"

“Since Allekant’s research institutions have their budget taken out from the Integrated Enterprise Foundation, the degree of freedom is entirely different. Well, World Dragon is also bureaucratic since their student council’s administrative body itself is closely related to the Integrated Enterprise Foundation.”

“I see...”

As he sneaked a look at a hall like a dojo, dozens of students were performing a dance in perfect order.

Just by looking at it in this way, he understood the reason why World Dragon has always maintained higher class in the results of <Festa>. Though there was also the fact that there were a great number of students, the ratio of students maintaining their will to fight was clearly high.

“Speaking of which, Ayato-kun also used a peculiar grappling technique, right? Look, the one you use at the time of your duel with Toudou Kirin-chan.”

“Just for note, there are also grappling techniques in the Amagiri Bright Dragon Style after all. If you say that, then it means that even you’re quite skilled in close quarters combat, right?”

He said so remembering how she defeated a <Page One> of World Dragon, although a former one, in a single blow at the time when they met for the first time, Sylvia lovely puffed up with pride.

“Even I don’t neglect my daily training after all.”

“But, it was quite a movement typical of actual combat, right? What kind of martial art is that?”

“Hmm... I haven’t heard about the origin and the name in particular. I was also taught the general basics, but the rest is almost self-taught. Ah, look, my music’s teacher whom I spoke about yesterday, I received training from her.”

“...From a music teacher?”

He felt that it was slightly unexpected, but he changed his mind that since it was a person who participated in the <Eclipse> in the first place, it was not strange.

“Ah, but I have a memory of her seemingly having said it was somehow related to the Viking...”

While continuing such a conversation, they turned at the corner of a corridor.

—At that moment.

“!?”

“Eh...?”

When the mana all around suddenly wriggled, the surrounding scenery twisted flabbily.

Though they squared off as they wondered what that was, at that time Ayato and Sylvia were already standing in the hall of wooden floor that they had never seen before.

“This is...”

“Hohoho, sorry for having used a slightly rough way to bring you here. But, it will be troublesome if there was uproar, you see?”

Then, a girl who arranged her hair like the wings of a butterfly appeared from the shade of a pillar.

She was about the same age as Flora. As she was wearing World Dragon’s uniform, she was probably a student.

“Phew... Geez, don’t surprise me too much like that, XingLu.”

“Long time no see, Ms. Diva.”

But, to the words of Sylvia who undid her guard as she said so, Ayato was at a loss for words.

“XingLu...? Then, this child is that Fan XingLu!?”

The Student Council President who was World Dragon Seventh Institute’s rank #1 with the nickname of <Divine Revelations>.

He heard stories about her, but he never thought that she was really such a young girl.

After all, XingLu hardly appeared in match videos. It was not like she was hiding her figure, but he heard that there were also many public events where she stood as representative.

It was no wonder that Ayato did not recognize her immediately.

“Indeed, I’m Fan XingLu. I’m glad to meet you, Amagiri Ayato. I have been interested in you since long ago.”

“Yea... Nice to meet.”

Still unable to understand the situation well, he took XingLu’s right hand that she held out.

“Your fighting style in the <Phoenix> was really splendid. By just remembering it, it gives me chills even now. It’s a real pity. Why don’t you enroll in World Dragon?”

“No, even you say that... wait, more importantly, how did you bring us here?”

The problem which came before that was how she noticed that they were Ayato and Sylvia even though they disguised themselves, but that was problem something trivial compared to the present situation.

“Shortening the earth vein and crossing over thousands of miles — well, it’s the so-called Shukuchi jutsu²². Strictly it’s its application though.”

“In other words, teleportation? So, there is also such a technique in the Star Senjutsu...”

If so, then he would really have to think about a countermeasure.

“No. It isn’t a Star Senjutsu.”

But, XingLu slowly shook her head.

“Eh...?”

If not, what on earth was that?

“It’s pointless to just think about it, Ayato-kun.”

Sylvia shrugged her shoulders with a somewhat resigned tone.

“I think it’s also the same for the other academies; but at the time when we became student council presidents, there is something we are told without fail. If World Dragon representative of our generation was <Divine Revelations>, don’t get involved with them more than necessary “no matter what”.”

“Hohou. It’s the first time hearing that, I see that you were told such a thing.”

XingLu looked pleased for some reason.

“No matter what?”

“Yes...”

Then after a deep sigh, Sylvia casually said.

²² <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shukuchi>

"I don't know whether it's true or not, but it's said that she has already lived more than one thousand years."

"One thousand years...? No matter how you look at it, that's a little..."

Even if she was an ability user or some sort, then it would mean that she has been living from far long before the <Ember Tears>. Hence, it was improbable since <Starpulse Generation> were born due to mana brought about by the <Ember Tears>.

"Hmm, are you saying you don't believe it?"

XingLu, with a face saying that it's really unexpected, folded her arms and looked up at Ayato.

"No, after all..."

"Well, never mind; you've taken the trouble to visit our academy. I will slightly enlighten you about the principle of this world."

Immediately after, the surroundings turned dark.

"—!"

"Don't be so on your guard. It's just... errr, right, what you call hologram."

"Hologram...?"

Exactly as stated, a translucent Earth dimly appeared in front of Ayato and Sylvia.

The Earth which slowly rotated — but, multiple meteorites suddenly appeared one after another there and poured down towards the Earth.

"Don't tell me this is..."

"Yes. It's the <Ember Tears>'s reproduction."

“But like this... it looks like these meteorites suddenly appeared around the Earth...”

“Indeed.”

To Sylvia’s mutter, XingLu greatly nodded.

“『All the astronomical observatories around the world hadn’t perceived the <Ember Tears> at all』 ...you people are also taught so in your lessons currently, right?”

There were still many mysteries regarding the <Ember Tears>, but at least it was currently common opinion that they were completely different from common meteorites.

“Then, no way— are you telling us it really happened suddenly?”

“Now, next I will teach you how these meteorites were looking to us.”

Not answering Sylvia’s question, XingLu snapped her fingers.

At the same time, the three-dimensional vision of Earth suddenly approached; and became a vision of the surface of the Earth seen from the sky.

A huge meteorite crossed before their eyes, and at the time when it looked like they crashed into the Earth,

“Eh...?”

“This is...”

Both Ayato and Sylvia doubted their own eyes.

At the center of the meteorite, a magic circle of layers which shone spread out.

Though different of scale, it was really similar to the one which appeared when the ability users like Julis activated their power.

And the inner part of that magic circle disappeared as it was completely gouged out.

“It looks like it transforms the energy of collision into the technique. Most likely, it has completely transformed all materials within range.”²³

“Transform...? Where to?”

“Even I don’t know. We call it the world over there.”

XingLu said so and broadly grinned.

“Now then, you are also taught this, right? That if it were a common meteorite, the mine dust due to excavating it from the earth surface and hauling it out should be hardly observed. This is the reason.”

Right. Looking from the scale, the <Ember Tears> should have a great disaster to the point that it wouldn’t have been a surprise even if the mankind was annihilated.

“The <Ember Tears> isn’t a natural disaster. It’s something which was intentionally caused by someone’s hands.”

“No way, such thing is...”

Even if someone who could do such a thing existed, his power could only be explain in the domains of divine.

But.

²³ Okay this part looks really hard on the translator so I’ll explain what I got from it when I looked at the raw and the translation. Basically, If I understand correctly, did no physical damage but was instead transferred the area of impact via magic (or transformed the word used is ambiguous but the following lines seem to point more towards transferring).

I also think the comment about the dust later is also inferring that the dust in the air could cause problems just like ash does when a volcano erupts by suffocating or burying people but was not present when occurred. I hope that helped.

-Yascob

“—Well, such thing doesn’t matter. No matter who did it for what for purpose, it has nothing with us now.”

XingLu plainly said so.

“Huh...?”

Then, what was that story so far for?

“My point is, if the <Ember Tears> is something which was caused by someone’s hands, nothing tells us that it will be limited at only that one time.”

“Do you mean to say that something like the <Ember Tears> might occur again after this?”

“There’s also that — but, what I want to say is the opposite.”

As she said up to there, Ayato also guessed what XingLu meant.

“I see...!”

Then, it meant that something similar might have happened in the past, too.

“Of course, the <Ember Tears>’s scale is unheard of. We²⁴ were also surprised. But it isn’t like that time was the first time that both mana and mana dites were brought about in this Earth. Even more before — long ago, although so little as not to compare with now, they have existed.”

“...Of course, <Starpulse Generation>, too.”

As Ayato continued so, XingLu greatly nodded.

“They were called wizards or Sennin²⁵ before.”

²⁴ sorry to mention this late, but when XingLu says 儂ら meaning “we”, she addressed only herself; from what I know, it was like that great nobles and people of royalty (Kings) were addressing themselves in old times

²⁵ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sennin>

“Hmm... I wonder if the scale was a little too big that it wouldn't be so readily accepted.”

When Sylvia muttered as troubled, XingLu cacklingly laughed.

“It's fine like that. Believing in it or not is at your own conveniences. And just because you know that, it isn't like something will change.”

“You're right. Rather as for me, I'm more concerned about what purpose someone who has lived for a millennium passes for a student.”

Although she was surprised at first, Sylvia asked naturally.

However, the eyes of XingLu heard it suddenly narrowed.

“...My purpose, you say?”

At that moment, a violent sense overpowering feeling blew.

An overwhelming mass of power as it looked like it stabbed the skin, smashed the bones and crushed the entrails by just being there. The air shook with a rattling sound and his body instinctively took a stance.

(I see... I agree with Captain Lindvall's words.)

The two persons Orphelia Landlufen and Fan XingLu whom the Guard Captain Helga Lindvall once spoke of as “different existences”. With this, Ayato has encountered the two persons, but either of them was surely an existence of a different dimension.

“Isn't it obvious? What I desire is to fight strong people.”

XingLu told with a joyful expression.

“Really, the current world is wonderful. It's brimming with young people who possess promising qualities. But, there's no meaning if that quality isn't drawn out and they aren't reared. Thus, I volunteer to teaching like this.”

“So in order for you to eat them tastily, you preciousy raise the cattle, huh.”

Even while dripping sweat, Sylvia was confronting XingLu head-on.

It was a surprising courage within this overpowering feeling.

“Hohoho, you say something good, Ms. Diva. It’s my principle not to snatch food and eat without the meal starting, but... when you release such a nice fragrance, there is also a limit as to how I can endure it.”

Dangerous light dwelled in XingLu’s pupils.

—But.

“Master, the preparations of the airship are complete... wait, what are you doing?!”

From the entrance of the hall which was left open, a surprised voice flew.

Immediately after, the overpowering feeling disappeared as if it was a lie.

“Oh, HuFeng. You came at a good moment. I was about to lose my patience.”

“Please, spare your personal struggles in the middle of the school festival. If such a thing were to happen, even if it is you Master, you would not leave without blame.”

“I understand, I understand — sorry, Ms. Diva. It looks like the joke went a little too far.”

“No, after all I knew you weren’t serious.”

Saying so, XingLu and Sylvia exchanged smiles.

“Then Master, who are those people...?”

The boy with looks as to be mistaken for a girl at first glance looked at Ayato and Sylvia with a perplexed face.

(Huh...? If I remember correctly, he's World Dragon's...)

"Yea. They are Seidoukan and Queen Veil's ranks #1. If I'm not mistaken."

"Yes...?"

The boy who heard that revealed a flabbergasted expression.

Just for note, they were in disguise, but now that it has become like this, there was no longer meaning for it.

As Ayato and Sylvia looked at each other and removed their disguises, the boy intently looked at them for a while to confirm their identities; but a color of surprise spread on his face in a twinkle before long.

"Eeeeeeeeeeeeh!? W-W-W-W-What is Sylvia-san doing here!?"

"Oh, that's right. Amagiri Ayato, You will also participate in the "Grand Coliseum", right? We were also about to head there. So you might as well come together with us."

Ignoring the boy as is, XingLu forcibly pulled Ayato's hand.

"Eh? W-Wait...!"

"Muh, Ayato-kun is still in the middle of a date with me, so don't decide that on your own accord."

Sylvia puffed her cheeks and ran after them, but XingLu turned a deaf ear to her.

"Hey, HuFeng. How long will you space out like that?"

"—Ah! Y-Yes! I am sorry!"

As XingLu called out to him, the boy who was standing stock still in blank amazement suddenly came to his senses and quickly rushed over.

“Now then, it’s finally the main event. It’ll be good if I find good raw materials²⁶.”

While pulling Ayato’s hand and steadily advancing the corridor, XingLu laughed really joyfully.

Chapter 6 – Grand Coliseum

Airships were a relatively common mean of transport in Asterisk. They, which were miniaturized by Meteoric Engineering technology, could take off and land well enough if there were landing fields of a heliport size.

That said, they were mainly oriented towards tourists, and students rarely used them. If there was an exception, it would be in case that the student council staff disliked congestion when they went out until the central district.

Like now.

“U-Um, I am sorry for the late introduction...! I-I am Zhao HuFeng, I act as the secretary in the World Dragon Seventh Institute Student Council!”

“You’re the <Tenka Musou>²⁷ Zhao-kun, right? Of course, I know you. If I’m not mistaken, you’ve also come to my concerts, right?”

“Eh? H-How do you know that...?”

²⁶ she speaks about students that would be worth training

²⁷ he correct wording for てんかむそう is 天下無双 which means: Invincible/ Undefeatable under the heaven. However the author using different Kanji

てんかむそう = 天下無双 = Invincible under the heaven = 天苛武葬 = Cruel heaven martial funeral – dragon1412

“From the stage, I’m looking as much as possible at the faces of people who always came at my concert. Naturally, I can’t remember everyone though.”

When Sylvia smiled sweetly, the boy — HuFeng’s face suddenly turned bright red.

“I-I’m honored!”

Speaking of the <Tenka Musou> Zhao HuFeng, he currently is the World Dragon Seventh Institute rank #5. He was a warrior who achieved the runner up status in the <Phoenix> four years ago — or he should be, but at the moment, he only looked like a mere fan.

“Sorry. That fellow likes Ms. Diva very much.”

XingLu sitting in front of Ayato clatteringly laughed as she said so.

World Dragon Seventh Institute’s airship where a dragon was drawn on the hull was a small size, but the interior was quite spacious. Although saying that, its guest room could gather up to ten people. The indoor was of an oriental structure typical of a World Dragon’s airship, a window was greatly open on the wall surface, and one could overlook Asterisk’s cityscape below.

“Speaking of which, errr...”

“XingLu is fine. You aren’t my disciple, so the honorific is unneeded.”

“Then, XingLu. That event, perhaps will you also participate?”

“No. This time, I’m taking part as the management side. Instead, HuFeng will participate.”

At her words, HuFeng who looked flustered completely switched his mood and knitted his brows.

“I said that I did not want to though. But Master forced me...”

Compared to XingLu, HuFeng seemed to have a pretty serious personality. So, one could easily guess that he was always anxious when it came to her.

“But well, it’s a rare opportunity since I can see <Murakumo>’s ability closely, so since I’m participating, I will effectively utilize it.”

As HuFeng said so, he turned a challenging gaze towards Ayato.

They were upright eyes as to let one feel the heat peculiar to a soldier.

“Also, there is also a big guest whose emergency participation was decided last night.”

“A big guest?”

“Yes, it’s the <Holy Knight>.”

“<Holy Knight>...? Don’t tell me the one from Garrardsworth?”

As he raised a surprised voice, XingLu contentedly nodded.

“Judging only from sword skill, there’s no one who surpassed him currently in Rikka. Well, if that young lady of your school was the same age, I don’t know how it would turn though.”

“Heeh, so even Ernest will participate...”

Sylvia who heard that was somewhat lost in thought.

“—Hey, XingLu. That event, are the registrations still opened?”

“Eh... Sylvie?”

“S- Sylvia-san!?”

To Sylvia who suddenly asked as such, Ayato and HuFeng’s complexions changed; but XingLu suddenly bent forward as to check it.

“Hohoho, aren’t you motivated, Mrs. Diva?”

“It’s certain that it’s a rare opportunity after all.”

“Good, good, it should be like that. What, the participation registrations are already closed, but you may leave it to me. I’ll make you participate even if I have to force it. —Well, I don’t think that there will be fools who will decline if Sylvia Lyyneheym wishes to participate though.”

XingLu said so and exultantly took out her portable terminal.

*

『Now, ladies and gentlemen gathered here in this hall! Have you fully enjoyed the annual school festival? Those who have already enjoyed themselves enough, no, even those who still haven’t had enough, let’s me assure you that going back home without watching this will be a great loss that will echo throughout your life! Thank you for waiting! It is finally the start of the Grand Coliseum!』

Eishiro’s voice echoed in the Sirius Dome and great storm-like cheers raised undulation as if to respond to it. That climax was in no inferior to that of a <Festa>.

All the participants were already gathered in the stage, and they numbered about 30.

Since as soon as Ayato and company arrived at the hall, they were handed a lux and showed to this stage, they were not yet told what they should do.

『I, Yabuki Eishiro of Seidoukan Academy Newspaper Club, will be in charge of the live coverage of this event jointly organized by three academies. Pleased to meet to you.』

When looking towards the commentary seat, Eishiro was grasping the mike with an indeed excited expression.

Still, Eishiro was making a very fine live coverage even though it was not his principal occupation.

“Yo, Amagiri. You still have that stupid look as usual. You don’t look like the <Phoenix>’s champion at all.”

Then, a familiar voice accosted Ayato from behind.

“Long time no see, Irene. You look energetic as usual.”

“Hmph, not quite. Thanks to a certain someone, <Gravi-Sheath> is no longer usable. I’m also ranked #18 now.”

Irene said so, but since she lost <Gravi-Sheath>, it was probably thanks to her high physical specs that she could be in that position. In fact, Ayato understood it after fighting her, but her self-taught taijutsu was little inferior even compared with the top rankings of World Dragon.

“Which reminds me, I heard that you came to our academy during the day. That you came accompanied by a woman. Unexpectedly, you aren’t to be underestimated, huh.”

Irene said so with a smirk.

“Ah, that’s...”

She had probably heard that from Priscilla.

But, how on earth should he explain it?

『This time, the contenders participating in this Grand Coliseum are only warriors up-and-coming ranks or higher in each academy who went through rigorous scrutiny! Since it’s a rare opportunity, I will introduce particularly well-known guest participants who are among them! First, the <Phoenix> champion and Seidoukan Academy rank #1 still fresh in everyone’s memory! The user of an old style swordsmanship transmitted from the warring eras, the <Murakumo> Amagiri Ayato!』

Then, the spotlights suddenly focused on Ayato, and he unintentionally closed his eyes partly due to their dazzle.

At the same time, cheers calling Ayato's name rose conspicuously and the hot atmosphere seemed to burn his skin.

『Furthermore, there is the <Holy Knight> of Garrardsworth whose participation was decided in a hurry! The leader of the Silver Wings Knights and rank #1 who won the <Gryps> twice successively, the last time and the time before last! A knight among knights whom that <Holy Sword> has fallen in love with at first sight, Ernest Fairclough!』

This time, the spotlights moved to Ayato's right and a handsome man wearing Garrardsworth's uniform lightly raised his hand.

Immediately after, piercing-like shrill cheers arose.

It looked like Ernest's popularity with women was quite high.

『And, and~! A really unexpected emergency participation! The matchless diva, the world's best top idol, Queen Veil's rank #1 and the <Lindvolus> runner-up! The one whose singing voice enchanted all things, the <Melodious Witch> Sylvia Lyyneheym~!』

And when the spotlights moved to Ayato's diagonal left deafening cheers, in incomparable amount with Ayato's and Ernest's, broke out in the Sirius Dome.

Rather than cheers, it was already close to shrieks.

“Wow... amazing.”

“Well, she's a world-class Diva after all. It's to be expected, right?”

Irene who said so did not seem that much interested in Sylvia.

“As for me, I'm more interested in that boy.”

Irene set her glance to HuFeng doing warm-ups by the wall.

“I came to think of doing hand-to-hand fighting again. But as expected, World Dragon's martial arts are more logical. In the way of using prana

or something like that, I guess? Among them, that guy is exceptionally skillful at it.”

“Heeh..... So that means Irene has happened to witness a battle Zhao HuFeng.”

The movements of prana and mana were quite hard to grasp with only a video recording.

Ayato has also watched a match video of HuFeng, but it somehow or other gave the impression that his speed was out of the common.

If it was only about speed, he might be faster than anyone Ayato has seen so far.

“Well yes. —Is it finally the explanation?”

As he returned his attention to Eishiro’s voice at Irene’s words, the explanation about the event contents was certainly about to begin.

『—With all that said, I shall finally explain what kind of event the Grand Coliseum is! After all, we’ve only disclosed the participatory field simulation battle in the prior announcement. I think that the contenders are already impatient to know it, too.』

It was quite amazing since the Sirius Dome was already full despite the fact that only such vague information was revealed. Rather, fanning the curiosity by keeping secrecy to some extent might also have worked effectively.

In fact, an event which used the Sirius Dome must go through the deliberation of Asterisk parliament which managed it. Needless to say that a large amount of funds was necessary, if the outlook as an event was a project with misgivings, it should have been rejected.

On that point, with only the fact that it was an event held in the Sirius Dome on the last day of the school festival, there would be many visitors who anticipated that quality should be secured to some extent.

『First of all, this Grand Coliseum is organized in three phases. The contender who clears each phase's condition can proceed to the next phase, but in case he fails, then he will be disqualified; so please note that.』

"Clear the condition, huh... it's seem like a game, I guess."

"I don't think it's something that sweet though. After all, I hear that the organizer of this event is the <Lion Faction>'s vice president."

Speaking of <Lion Faction>, Camilla Pareto was its president and it was Allekant's largest faction.

"Currently, the <Lion Faction> is right in the midst of headship dispute of Camilla Pareto. This event too is mostly planned basically as to show off her research results."

Certainly it was difficult to imagine that she simply organized an event of this scale as a mere entertainment.

"Well then, let's stop with the chat here. Do your best."

When Irene said so, she parted from Ayato while waving her hand.

A huge space screen was unfolded overhead of the stage and the small conditions that Eishiro was explaining now were displayed there.

『And here is an important point, the Grand Coliseum isn't a battle royal! Hence, battles between players are prohibited. In case that one was to intentionally attack another contender, he will immediately be disqualified; so please note that. In addition, in order to expect fairness regarding the contenders' weapons, we will have them use normal luxes which the management prepared.』

"Oh, so that's why I was given this."

What was given to Ayato was a blade type lux.

No matter what the conditions were, if he were to use <Ser-Versta> in a setting where a weapon was necessary, it could not be considered nothing but as unfair.

『Similarly, <Strega> and <Dante> are prohibited the use of their abilities — though I say that, there is only one person whom it applied to among the participants this time.』

Needless to say, that one person was Sylvia.

It seemed that the management wanted to have contests with only physical ability and technique purely.

(I guess, they probably had their eyes on the <Strega> and <Dante> beforehand with that “strict scrutiny”

There was a chance that XingLu might protest against concerning Sylvia, but as expected her name value exceed it.

『Now then, we’ll leave the introduction as this and begin the first phase at once!』

At the same time as Eishiro’s words, the illumination changed completely and countless glitters poured down from the ceiling to the center of the stage.

“Is that a Shining Type Long-Range Induction Armament (Rectolux)...?”

The shining blade of light sword devices and the large gun devices both equally stopped in mid-air. Their number was probably not less than hundred.

Judging from the fact that the users’ figure could not be seen, though one did not know how many people it took, they might be operating from a different place.

『Now, as you see, this is the new type lux which is the topic of talk right now! I will ask the participants to clear the condition while getting through the attacks of these!』

The Shining Type Long-Range Induction Armament that Allekant and Seidoukan jointly developed and that Julis served as a monitor has just been officially announced at the end of last year.

Therefore, at present its users were only limited to the students of Allekant and Seidoukan; but it would eventually be spread to the other academies, too.

“...I see, so the first phase also serves as demonstration of this, huh.”

As Irene said, there seemed to be a lot of expectations behind the scenes.

『The condition to clear is to destroy the target terminals within the time limit. Since the target terminals' mana dities' color isn't the usual green, but changed to red, please aim at it. However, there are 20 in total. And there are 31 participants, so at least 11 people will drop out here.』

When he said and confirmed it, among the Shining Type Long-Range Induction Armament, terminals with a different color were certainly mixed in.

『In addition, in this first phase, unlike the <Festa>, the whole body will be the target for judgment. On the occasion when one was hit by an attack, they will be disqualified regardless of the existence or not of the damage; so please be careful.』

That was again a very severe condition.

A one-on-one fight aside, the fact that, this was an environment where it would force a melee situation and would push the participants to be jumbled up together, even one hit from another participant was not permitted, and the stage was considerably advantageous for the organizer side.

『—You all, participants, are you ready? Well then first phase, start!』

Immediately after, Shining Type Long-Range Induction Armaments deployed so as to surround the participants.

“Sigh... it isn’t fun to be used for somebody’s convenience, but I guess I’ll do my best for the time being.”

Almost at the same time as Ayato released his seal, light bullets came attacking him from 360° all directions. Moreover, the sword type devices flew about so as to close their openings, some of them revolved overhead which was their blind spot, and there were also some which nose dive.

—But.

For Ayato who could use the state of “cognition”, dodging such attacks was a piece of cake.

No matter how many they were, the competency of the user meant everything for the things known as weapon after all.

From what Ayato saw, the users of the Shining Type Long-Range Induction Armaments did not seem to be as skilled as Julis.

As he looked for a target device while casually repelling the light bullets with his sword, he found it before long.

The target device, not participating in the attacks, was cautiously swimming the outer perimeter; but as if having noticed that Ayato aimed for it, it immediately flew to the back as to escape.

“Oops...!”

However, Ayato saw through the angle of a light bullet which attacked him and eluded it, and changed its trajectory to the target. It hit the target accurately and the target lost its balance in mid-air.

When Ayato instantly shortened the distance while slipping through a barrage, he cut down under the handle of the target with one stroke of his sword.

『T-This is early! Player Amagiri clears the first phase within the first minute after the start!』

“Phew...”

While hearing lively cheers, Ayato moved back to a corner of the stage.

“—As one would expect of you, Amagiri-kun.”

Then, a young man who similarly parted from the melee — Ernest spoke to Ayato.

It looked like Ernest has also cleared the first phase early.

“Hahaha, I’m really honored to be praised by Asterisk’s strongest swordsman.”

“I’m not something that exaggerated — should I say nice to meet you. Though we met in the award ceremony of the <Phoenix>.”

Ayato grabbed Ernest’s right hand which was held out.

He had never thought that he would shake hands with two ranks #1 twice on the same day.

“Your school²⁸ seems to assume fights of one against many, so as expected is this kind of situation your specialty?”

“Well, yes. A one-on-one fight is basic in Garrardsworth School’s swordsmanship, right?”

“Yes, it isn’t a development from a battlefield swordsmanship, but rather from duel swordsmanship after all.”

Since he was Garrardsworth’s student council president, Ayato thought that it would be a more formal person; but he unexpectedly gave off a friendly atmosphere. He was slightly older than Ayato, probably around 20 years old.

However, Ernest, still holding Ayato’s hand as is, fixedly stared at his face.

²⁸ school arts, refers to the Amagiri style

“Errr... what is it?”

“No, it was rude of me. Actually, since some time now I have wanted to talk slowly with you once. Well, I guess we can’t do it slowly in this situation.”

When Ernest said so and released his hand, he revealed a bitter smile.

“I was also told the something similar a while ago... By World Dragon’s student council president.”

“Hahaha, if you’ve caught the princess’s eye, then I guess it means that you’re the real deal.”

“But for some reason, I can’t seem to grasp that person, so I’m a little...”

Then, Sylvia came their way with a displeased face.

“Hmm, so this is a Shining Type Long-Range Induction Armament, huh... it isn’t really what I’ve expected.”

Sylvia did not seem to like the new type lux.

“Oh, Miss Lyyneheym. As expected, you were acquainted with Amagiri-kun, huh?”

“Well, yes. But, what do you mean by ‘as expected’?”

“Yesterday, both of you came to my school, right?”

“Oh my... were we found out?”

To his words, Ayato and Sylvia looked at each other.

They certainly went around Garrardsworth on the afternoon, but it might be said that it was the most peaceful academy without any incident in particular. They did not think that their identities have been found out.

“We have a girl with good eyes in our school, you see?”

“Ah, I see. That girl wearing men’s clothes, huh.”

As she had an idea of whom it was, Sylvia held her forehead with a face saying “oops”.

“Our vice-president who heard that the ranks #1 of Queen Veil and Seidoukan came over together, was a little worried about it. But, it looks like it was a needless anxiety.”

“Well, we were only on a date after all. Right, Ayato-kun?”

“Hahaha...”

“Hou, I’m really envious.”

As the three of them continued their idle chat as is for a while, the big buzzer sound suddenly echoed.

『End of the first phase!』

When they returned their gazes to the stage center at Eishiro’s voice, the Shining Type Long-Range Induction Armament, which were numerous in numbers, had stealthily decreased in number.

At the same time, there seemed to be more participants, who retired at the first stage than they thought.

But, there was something that Ayato was more anxious about.

(The first phase lasts about 15 minutes, huh... if the two remaining phases look like they will take too much time, then it’ll be slightly bad I guess.)

Ayato released the seal applied on him by Haruka, and the time he was able to go all out became much longer than before. But still, it was only over one hour. It was slightly doubtful whether or not he would last until the end of the event.

『—With that said, 15 people broke through the first phase! About half has dropped out! I'm sorry, but those who have been disqualified, please exit immediately.』

To the participants who left as they dropped their shoulders crestfallenly, applauses — although hard to say that it was too grand — were sent by the gallery.

There were also the figures of HuFeng and Irene among the remaining participants, and the other members were all people who seemed quite talented, too.

On the other hand, when considering the fact that all the members were ranked, although there were some strict conditions, it was possible to make a standard assessment for the usefulness of the Shining Type Long-Range Induction Armament which reduced their number by half.

『Now then, I'm very sorry for saying this as the participants are tired, but since we must also take the time into account, we would like to begin the second phase at once.』

Following Eishiro's voice, from the entrance gate that was in the wall surface opposite to Ayato and company, a huge shadow appeared.

“Is that... a puppet?”

At first glance, that huge frame which was wrapped in a dignified and solid armor indeed resembled the autonomous type puppet that fought in the <Phoenix>. However, its overall form was thicker and more rustic than Ardi's and it was hard to say that it was stylish.

These entered in the stage one after another.

“No, aren't they rather external skeletons for battle (powered suits)?”²⁹

Ernest corrected Ayato's mutter.

²⁹ note that I'll now use “powered suits” instead of “external skeletons for battle” for the rest of the chapter

So it meant that there were people inside moving them.

『Now then, the condition to clear for the second phase is the opposite of the one of a little while ago. It will be clear if you succeeded in escaping from the attack of these new model powered suits within a fixed time. Of course, you participants may also attack. However, similarly to the first phase in case that you are hit by an attack of the powered suits, you'll be disqualified at that time, so please be careful.』

Eishiro said it was the opposite, but it'd be better to think that substantially what one have to do did not change that much.

"Hmm... there are around 20 of them in total, I guess."

As Sylvia said, there were slightly more powered suits than the participants who passed the first phase.

"They have probably prepared it so that they aren't less than the number of people who passed the first phase."

"That's indeed possible."

It looked like even the organizers have really put more thought to it.

『Well then second phase, start!』

Along with the signal, one powered suit took the lead and charged.

"Heeh... This is a surprise."

Ernest who saw it raised a voice of admiration.

Even Ayato imagined that its movement would be duller judging from its appearance, but it was a speed far beyond it.

The nearest participant, seeming to be aimed at, set up a sword type lux and fought back.

A blade of light similar to the participant's sword unfolded from the powered suit's right arm and intensely clashed with the participant's

blade — or so it looked like it, but to everyone's surprise the powered suit's blow sent the participant's body flying as is.

Moreover, light bullets shot from its left arm as they aimed for the participant who fell. Both weapons seemed to be built-in weapons.

『Oh, without delay one participant has already been eliminated! How many people will really break through this second phase?』

“Oh, this looks quite tough, eh.”

Sylvia too frankly admired it, but in the meantime several powered suits were also heading her way.

But as Ayato was about to set up his lux, Sylvia took one step forward and held him with one hand.

“Let's say that it's 'ladies first' here.”

Sylvia winked at Ayato as she said that.

An extremely normal one hand sword type lux was tightly grasped in her right hand.

“It isn't a weapon I'm familiar with, so it isn't quite fitting; but I'll somehow manage, I guess?”

The weapon Sylvia used during the match was a bayonet type lux. Since it was a borrowed large-scale weapon, the way to use it would certainly differ.

Even so Sylvia, without getting worked up at all, blocked the way of the powered suit.

The fact that the powered suit seemed to be perplexed for an instant was proof that there was someone inside controlling it.

However, it immediately shifted to offensive stance and mowed down straight the blade of its right hand.

At the same time as Sylvia easily dodged its attack, she drove a slash to the powered suit's torso.

—However.

“Oh my... It's also harder than I thought.”

Even though Sylvia's attack should have perfectly gotten in, only a slight trace remained on the powered suit's armor surface as it did not receive damage at all.

If that attack just now was not good, then it would probably be difficult to penetrate their armors head on.

“...No, does the fact that the organizers prepared the luxes mean that they rather had such an intention from the beginning?”

From the feel of using it, she did not think that the lux's power was that weak, but if this was serving as a demonstration, it would be no wonder even if it was adjusted to a level where they would be one-sidedly beaten.

“Hmm. That's a trick which spoils the fun.”

As Ernest also noticed it, he boringly looked at his lux.

“Well, if that's the case, I shall go at it seriously.”

As Sylvia, who took the distance once, said so, she sneaked around behind powered suit while dodging the light bullets it shot by jumping.

The powered suit also turned around with a swift reaction and tried to shoot the light bullets at her, but—

“...Too bad. Your rhythm is a little too simple.”

As soon as Sylvia's sword splendidly flashed faster than it, the powered suit's arms languidly dropped and it fell down to its knees.

“—!?”

Although surprise and perplexity were leaked from within the powered suit, he probably did not even understand what was done to him.

Sylvia aimed at the powered suit's operation area — the limbs' joints.

Although that was the theory when fighting against an opponent with heavy armor, at least this powered suit took measures against it. In order to protect the operation area without hindering its movement, it was constructed so that the armor could change to defend any time.

But, Sylvia aimed at the instant when the armor would transform and slid in the slash.

"As expected of Miss Lyyneheym. If she's able to pull out such a feat even without her ability, I guess I'll lose face if I don't something flashier."

Ernest said so and activated his lux.

"In that case, could you leave the next to me as your senior?"

Ernest said so to Ayato as he gazed at the two powered suits which were heading his way.

"Um, I will deal with the other one..."

Ayato started to say so, but Ernest interrupted with only a smile.

"...I got it."

Since his start was spoiled for the second time³⁰, he could not help but quietly watch here.

When Ernest stepped forward, the two powered suits took position so as to sandwich him from right and left. This was also a standard strategy of a many-to-one fight.

³⁰ the first time having been spoiled by Sylvia

On the other hand, Ernest, not even setting up his sword, stood idly by not showing any signs of attacking. At first glance, it looked like he was full of openings; but Ayato perceived the fact that a blade lay dormant within that defenselessness.

Then, the moment when the two powered suits moved — the two suits' right arms were simultaneously blown away along with an explosion.

『O-Ooh! This is, what on earth happened!? The arms of the powered suits which were up against player Fairclough exploded all of sudden!』

Though Eishiro shouted with a stunned voice, Ayato who understood what Ernest did was more surprised.

“And you’ve the nerve to say something like losing face...”

Ernest had aimed at the moment when the powered suits activated their built-in luxes — exactly just before the blades materialized, and attacked there with the tip of his sword.

And the two suits at the same time, at that.

If the timing was early even a little, it would have been blocked by the armor; also if it was late even a little, it would have clashed with the blades. It would probably be impossible even for Kirin to do the same thing. It was that much of a feat.

“Looks like Asterisk strongest swordsman isn’t just for show, huh...”

Above all else, what was terrifying was that neither Sylvia nor Ernest was even going all out.

At the same time that he was amazed, Ayato shivered as he felt his heart throb.

That feeling did not last long and Ayato set up his sword while looking at the powered suit coming at him.

*

“N-No way! That’s impossible! Such, such a thing...!”

The Allekant Academy <Lion Faction>’s vice-president Narcisse Perroy who was also the Grand Coliseum’s supervision operation general manager was trembling all over in a special watching room of the Sirius Dome.

On the stage under his eyes, the second phase already ended and five people who broke through it met cheers.

In Narcisse’s assumption, it was originally expected that no one would pass this second phase.

In the first place, this Grand Coliseum was something that Narcisse planned in order to ensure his influence inside the <Lion Faction>.

In the development of the new type lux, in the cooperation with Seidoukan’s Meteoric Engineering Research Club where he made connection, it should just have been an event in order to perform the demonstration of Seidoukan’s Shining Type Long-Range Induction Armament and their (<Lion Faction>) powered suits.

In the first place, it should have been held in a smaller public building originally.

There—

“Hohoho, that was a quite splendid farce, eh. Well, that kind of unshapely toys can only do that much, I guess.”

Narcisse glared at the little girl —XingLu who was innocently laughing in a seat next to him.

(T-That’s right! After this kid got involved with it, it took a weird turn...!)

About half a year ago when XingLu had contacted Narcisse.

Not knowing where she got wind of the talk of the event, she requested that she also wanted to make one contribution.

At first, Narcisse was not that interested, but he immediately changed his thought when he heard that she would take charge of most of the funds needed.

Besides judging even from Allekant's viewpoint, there were many interesting things in the technology that World Dragon had. Even their famous Star Senjutsu, although the <Urbemensch Faction> had studied it for many years in an attempt to reproduce it, they failed. Narcisse also thought that, with a little bit of luck, he could steal even one part of it³¹.

But, XingLu was added to the management and made the event's scale bigger at a stretch. She gathered participants on a large scale, seized the Sirius Dome for the School Festival last day and before one knew, the reward total amount jumped up to ten times the one planned at first. Moreover, without hearing the reason why she wanted to be in charge of the third phase, Narcisse unwillingly yield to it.

In addition, because media-affiliated groups were weaker in Allekant than other academies, that area had been entrusted to the Seidoukan side; but with that influence, they went as far as to even have the name of the <Phoenix> champ added as a guest entry.

Moreover, big names such as Ernest Fairclough on the day before the event and Sylvia Lyyneheym on the very day decided to participate, and it already became a situation completely out of Narcisse's control.

However, although anything and everything was unexpected, still Narcisse had prospects of success.

Be it Amagiri Ayato or Ernest Fairclough, they would be helpless as long as their weapon did not work. The output of the luxes that he prepared was adjusted so that, even if they were to use Meteor Arts, they would not be able to pierce the powered suits' armors.

Since it was planned from the beginning that <Strega> and <Dante> were not going to participate, he was scared to death with Sylvia's

³¹ World Dragon's technology

participation; but even that would be no problem if he forbid the use of ability. Rather, although with a handicap, it would become the best demonstration if he was able to completely block a rank #1. It should have been.

And yet.

“But, it was too bad for you, Mr. General Manager. Your proud toys were pitifully annihilated.”

“That... There’s no way that can’t be! My powered suits should be far superior to Ernesta’s dolls...!”

That’s right. More than extremely absurd defective product like giving a self to a doll, he turned all the resources into weapons and the judgment was that a powered suit which was operated by a human should be absolutely superior.

He thought that the <Lion Faction> — Camilla joining hands together with the <Sculptor Faction> was a mistake. If he proved it, the seat of the next president should definitely have been his.

“You, who only look at the number, will never understand. But, it doesn’t matter to me. If you are so comfortable in an ivory tower, you should just stay there as much as you want.”

When XingLu jumped off her seat as she said so, she walked briskly to the door.

“W-Where are you...?”

“I’m in charge of the third phase after all. So, I thought I should watch the game closer.”

XingLu’s voice was excited like that of a child who could no long wait for an enjoyment and she opened the door.

“W-Wait...! Could you give me one more chance? There are still reserves of powered suits. If you leave the third phase to me...”

As he said up to there, Narcisse's mouth suddenly stopped.

"...Kid, say quality after thinking a little. Leave it to you, you said?"

"——"

Narcisse's body irresistibly froze to the overpowering feeling released by XingLu. He became unable to move even one finger. With fear as if his heart was tightly held, he could not even breath as he wanted let alone uttering his voice.

—But.

"From my viewpoint, what you're also doing is in no way different from a farce."



Such a voice suddenly resounded from the corridor and an unknown woman entered the room.

Her figure which wore a hood over her eyes was indeed suspicious, and it was to the extent that it was barely revealed whether it was a woman by the voice and build. This special watching room was a so-called VIP ROOM, so one would be unable to enter unless he/she passed the guards. Furthermore, as the guards would not possibly let such a suspicious person through without contacting the persons inside the room, it accelerated Narcisse's confusion.

"Hmm... who are you?"

As XingLu had no idea who she was, either, she looked at the woman with a quizzical face.

Then, the woman gave a small sigh and took off her hood.

Her age range was in the mid-twenties. She was quite a beauty with finely chiseled features and the simple clothes like a cloth coiling around her emphasized the lines of her firm body.

"Hmm... as expected, I have no clue about who you are."

XingLu fixedly stared at her face while cocking her head in puzzlement, but as soon as she suddenly dropped her gaze to the woman's chest, she struck her hand.

"Oh! I was wondering who it was, that's again quite a lovely body you have there."

"That's my line."

Narcisse did not know at all what kind of conversation they were having, but ahead of XingLu's gaze, the woman form was unbalanced because of a necklace she was wearing. Moreover, that was not a normal necklace. The entire thing was mechanical and the huge jewel was arranged as if designing after a one-eyed monster.

“So, for what reason did you expressly come all the way here?”

Though XingLu asked so with folded arms, the woman, not answering it, briskly went across the room and walked to the glass wall facing on the stage.

“...Since you unusually made a public appearance, I just came to invite you again.”

“No matter how many times you come, my answer won’t change.”

“Taking your purpose into consideration, I think that joining hands with us is the quickest way though. At least, it’ll be much better than doing such a troublesome thing.”

While looking down at the stage, the woman plainly spitted out so.

It was about time when the third phase would soon begin below.

“It’s not also like I don’t understand your point, but recently, I too have been enjoying raising/training raw materials from the beginning, you see? Besides — as I had also said before, I like fights, but I already got tired of conflicts.”

“...I see. Then, it can’t be helped. However, remember this. If you get our way, we too will have no mercy.”

As soon as the woman expressionlessly said so, the jewel of the necklace emitted black brightness.

(No, that isn’t a jewel...? That’s...)

“Hohou, is that a threat?”

“It’s a warning. At least, I am paying respect suitable for you.”

When the woman said so, XingLu stifled laughter.

“Kukuku, I’m thankful for that.”

“.....”

The woman sighed again and once again wore the hood.

—Narcisse had two misfortunes.

One was, this time, for having called out to the woman as he was unable to contain his inquiring mind.

“W-Wait a minute...!”

The other was to have known what that necklace was.

Either way Narcisse was a researcher, thus that was the reason for tragedy.

“That’s... the stone of that necklace is an Ulm mana dite, right? Then, perhaps is that... an ogre, lux...?”

A Pure Star Type Armament (ogre lux), as its name said, should basically have been a kind of weapon armament. He has never saw or heard about an ogre lux with the shape of an accessory,

“Who on earth would do such a thing...”

To these words that Narcisse said half muttering, the woman who was about to leave the room stopped.

“Good grief... Even though it is said that curiosity does not kill only the cat.”

XingLu looked at Narcisse with pitying eyes.

“——”

The woman turned around and immediately after the necklace’s Ulm mana dite emitted black brightness again, Narcisse’s consciousness broke off with a snapping sound.

Chapter 7 – Ladislav’s Youngest Child

『Now then, it’s finally the climax of this Grand Coliseum, the third phase! As you might expect from the last phase, the condition to clear is very simple, if you knock down World Dragon Seventh Institute’s two proud guardians within the time limit, you’ll be declared victorious! Moreover, this time unlike the two previous phases, there is no hit judgment, so no matter how many attacks you receive, you won’t be disqualified! Please, rest assured!』

“...So this means that fairly unreserved attacks will come, right?”

“Well, the princess³² being involved probably means that it’s the real thing from here on.”

Ernest agreed to Ayato’s mutter.

Having remained for the third phase were the five people Ayato, Ernest, Sylvia, HuFeng and Irene.

One among them, HuFeng was for some reason pondering with a sour face.

“What’s the matter, Zhao-kun?”

“No, I am sorry. I have a somewhat bad feeling...”

Even when Sylvia called out to him, HuFeng’s expression did not clear up at all.

『Well then, I’ll ask World Dragon’s guardians to make their appearance!』

When Eishiro declared so, a big hold opened in the stage’s central part and something gradually rose from under by means of a mechanical device.

“Ah... So, it’s really BaiQin and HeiFu after all...”

³² princess refers to XingLu

HuFeng who saw them held down his face while saying so with a voice mixed with amazement and grief.

What have appeared were two black and white giants — although called so, it was not something mechanical like puppets and powered suits, their outward appearance was rather close to handicraft-like carved wood statues. Their faces attached a simple mask and empty holes were gaping wide opened only on the part of eyes. Their arms were strangely thick and long in contrast to their bodies and their fists could almost touch the ground though they were standing straight.

They would be about one size bigger than the powered suits that Ayato and company fought in the second phase. The white giant held a sword in each hand and the black giant held a very long spear with both hands, and a strange pattern was drawn on all over their bodies.

“Oi boy, if you know, then tell me. What’s that?”

“Boy? ...Well whatever.”

HuFeng knitted his brows to Irene’s way of calling him, but he immediately pulled himself together and began to speak while pointing at the giants.

“The white one there is called BaiQin and the black one HeiFu — both of them are World Dragon’s hermit tools that the first generation <Divine Revelations> left. So, they are, so to speak, something like guards of the Yellow Dragon Temple.”

“Hermit tools?”

“The successive generations <Divine Revelations> were also proficient at fire skills, and they created various weapons armaments. Those are known as hermit tools... but, they are originally not to be taken outside World Dragon.”

It seemed that that was the reason why HuFeng was at wits’ end.

“I don’t care about that. More importantly, are they strong?”

“—They wouldn’t be guards if they were weak, right?”

It was approximately at the same time as HuFeng answered so that Eishiro’s voice resounded in the hall.

『Well then, third phase start!』

But even when the announcement of the start was made, BaiQin and HeiFu substantially took stance as is and did not move.

Ayato set up his blade type lux with the point aimed at their eyes and sounded them out as he measured his breathing and the distance, but it was a quite mysterious feeling.

They were neither machines nor living things; having said that, they were different from Gustave Malraux’s magic beasts that he fought in Lieseltania, something unknown that they had never faced, until now.

“Tch, it won’t get anywhere like that.”

The moment when Irene who lost her temper struck her fists and was about to step forward—

“Wha-!?”

HeiFu who shortened the distance with wind-like movement mowed down Irene with its spear.

Although Irene promptly bent over and dodged that blow, HeiFu rotated its spear as is and drove its (spear) butt end into Irene’s abdomen.

“Kahah...!”

Irene who was vigorously blown away crashed to the defense wall from her back and collapsed trailingy.

“Irene!”

“Damn...! I was careless...!”

When Ayato called out to her in panic, Irene unsteadily stood up while bleeding from the edge of her mouth.

She seemed to be somehow safe, but it would be impossible for her to immediately come back to fight.

Both that offensive ability which made Irene unable to keep fighting and that speed were a threat, but what was surprising above all was that its presence could not be felt at all.

“Not feeling presence at all at that speed isn’t funny...”

At the opportunity where Ayato turned his attention to Irene for just an instant, the blade BaiQin which sneaked around behind him swung downward aiming at Ayato.

“Oops...!”

He warded it off with his blade of light and ran through as he passed under the opponent’s arm.

In so doing, he mowed down at its torso as he slipped through, but contrary to looking as if it was made out of wood, it had incredible durability and was not damaged at all.

BaiQin turned its face around Ayato’s way and tried to set up again the swords of both hands.

“Haa!”

But, in the timing where it was turning around to Ayato’s way, from the side HuFeng’s kick gouged its flank.

BaiQin’s large build was blown away and HuFeng furthermore set up chase.

In a blink of an eye, he jumped to BaiQin’s bosom, drove in fists consecutively to its abdomen, lastly threw a roundhouse kick and then took distance.

His speed was astounding. It was at a level where even Ayato's eyes could barely catch with it. It would probably only looked like teleportation for an ordinary person.

(Does he use prana for acceleration...!)

Ayato noticed that HuFeng's prana was always kneaded into his legs.

Prana could raise defense ability and the offensive ability in empty-handed fight; but if one enhanced his explosive power in the same way, high-speed movement like now would theoretically become possible, too.

However in contrast with the former two, the degree of difficulty was high beyond comparison for the latter. This was because if one were to make even a little mistake in the adjustment, he would easily lose control of his body. Anyway, only recklessly jumping highly aside, extraordinary proficiency was necessary when using it in a battle which required accurate movements.

"Ooh~, as expected Zhao-kun is very fast."

Sylvia who dodged HeiFu's attack greatly jumped back and landed near Ayato.

"That's a great feat only possible with needle-like precision of prana's control technique."

Ayato frankly admired.

That was also the field which Ayato was not very good at the most.

"That acceleration is also changed to offensive power, how frightening."

"...Even so, I don't feel like he's dealing that much damage though."

HuFeng overwhelmed BaiQin with speed and number of punches, but he did not deal damage enough to knock it down.

As Sylvia said, HuFeng's every single blow should have quite destructive power, but they had no idea at all what kind of materials the hermit tools were made with.

"Fufufu, looks like this might be bad if I don't take it seriously... even if I say so, it's a little bothersome to not be able to sing."

Not being able to use their ability was originally quite fatal for <Strega> and <Dante>.

Nevertheless, the fact that Sylvia did not look inferior at all despite being the only <Strega> was proof that her strength did not depend on her ability, but that she was supported by a clear combat skill and high body specs.

"But well, I guess there's no point in asking for too much. I only have to manage with what I have now."

As Sylvia said so, the blade of light of the sword she held in her hand swelled up at a stretch.

"To think that you'd suddenly initiate Meteor Arts with a lux that you used for the first time... as one would expect of you."

"If I carry the signboard of a rank #1, I must be able to do this much."

Although Sylvia lightly said that, at least it was impossible for Ayato.

"Now then Ayato-kun, could you help me, too?"

"As you wish."

When Sylvia winked at him instead of a reply, she blocked HeiFu's spear as she replaced Ernest who was facing it by himself.

"Oh, I'm thankful that you came to my help."

As Ernest, who calmly said so, did not really go all out, he seemed to be devoted to defense to the bitter end. He was not sweating even one bit.

“Is Mr. <Holy Knight> only here to watch? If you’re not motivated, you may as well go back.”

“I cannot do that. If I leave it to a woman and stand by as a mere spectator, I will be forsaken by <Lei-Glems>.”

Ernest was about to set up his sword while saying so as troubled, but Ayato ran past his side one step earlier than Ernest who was about to slash.

“Oh.”

“Amagiri Bright Dragon Style, Grappling Technique — “Stance Breaker””

When Ayato slipped into HeiFu’s bosom as if sliding, he destroyed its balances as he flipped up the handle of the spear crossing with Sylvia’s blade with a fist and moreover, threw a roundhouse kick at full force to the pivot leg.

No matter how large a build it had, it was easy to defeat it if you made its power’s flow derail.

Violently shaking, Sylvia’s sword flashed as HeiFu bent forward.

“Tch, it’s really hard, jeez!”

While hearing Sylvia’s complain, Ayato too immediately sneaked around behind it and swung his blade straight; but as expected the attack was not good enough.

“—Then, how about this?”

Just as she raised her gaze while surprised at that voice, Ernest who flew highly had his sword thrust into HeiFu’s mask to the hilt.

When looking carefully, the sword’s blade increased in brightness in the same way as that of Sylvia — in other words, it was Meteor Arts.

It looked like what Sylvia said was not necessarily a joke.



『This is gorgeous! A coordination attack by three academies' ranks #1 exploded!』

“Hey, taking the best part is unfair.”

As Sylvia, who took distance once, blamed so, Ernest who similarly went away from HeiFu slightly waved his head with a serious look as is.

“...No, it looks like it won't go so well.”

“Eh...?”

『But! But still! The guardian wasn't stopped! What sturdiness!』

HeiFu, which slowly got up, set up its spear once again as if nothing happened.

“Just for note, I aimed for the parts of eyes thinking that it was its weak point. Who knows how it was built, it seemed to be sucked in and there was no response at all.”

“...Oh.”

As for Ayato, he did not know what to say.

“Hmm, in that case aiming at the operating area like just now doesn't look like it'll work, so...”

But, then.

“—!”

Sylvia suddenly interrupted the words she was about to speak.

“Sylvie?”

“.....”

Even when he called out to her wanting to ask what was wrong, there was no reaction.

Sylvia had an expression that Ayato had never seen so far. She greatly opened her eyes, harking back to amethyst, wide and her lips were trembling. Shock and confusion as if she saw something completely unbelievable — they were little by little repainted in delight that she could not contain.

When he looked at the direction of her gaze, it seemed to be turned towards the most top of the audience seating.

(I recalled that that area is the special watching room...?)

“—Sorry Ayato-kun, I will retire from here! Ah, if you don’t mind, use this!”

Then, as Sylvia revealed an evasive smile and handed the lux which she was using to Ayato, she started running towards the entrance gate.

“Eh? W-Wait, Sylvia?”

Even if he was suddenly told such a thing, Ayato could not but be confused, too.

『Eh? Huh? W-What happened? Sylvia Lyyneheym, does she possibly renounce midway?』

Eishiro’s perplexed voice resounded and stir occurred from the hall. However, Sylvia, as she did not mind it at all, disappeared as is to the other side of the gate.

“What on earth is...?”

Ayato once again looked closely at the point where Sylvia was looking.

In the special watching room’s north side — immediately to the other side of the glass wall there, a figure of a person seeming to be a woman seemed to be looking down his way.

“!”

As soon as he caught her figure, a chill ran down Ayato's spine.

The figure immediately disappeared to the back, but that was enough to make Ayato shiver.

(What the hell was that just now...?)

It was not fear.

It was something that came from evasion regarding a more basic, incompatible existence.

Rather, if he were to look for a sensation close to it from his past experiences—

(It's that time, when I faced <Gravi-Sheath> which took over Irene.)

Its loud laughter full of malice flashed across his mind.

The bad feeling did not stop.

If Sylvia went to meet that figure—

“It's bad...! Fairclough-san, sorry! I retire here as well!”

“Eeh? What is it, all of sudden?”

Though Ernest raised a surprised voice, Ayato has already started running.

But as he was a few steps until the entrance gate, BaiQin's large build was blown off as if to block his way.

“Hahahahahaha! Did you see?! Don't underestimate me, piece of trash!”

When he looked, Irene, who returned to the battle before he knew, revealed a ferocious smile while heavily breathing. How much prana she hit it with, traces of Irene's fist remained on the area of BaiQin's solar plexus.

Next to her, even HuFeng was also dumbfounded.

But even so, BaiQin still showed no signs at all of having received damage.

As BaiQin slowly got up, it turned its hollow eyes this time towards Ayato.

It seemed to have changed its target to Ayato.

“.....My bad, but I’m a bit in a hurry. Can you let me through?”

He tentatively said so, but of course there was no way that BaiQin could grant it.

As Ayato shortly sighed and dropped his waist, he took a stance with the blade type lux in his right hand and the one hand sword type lux, which he received from Sylvia, in his left hand.

BaiQin was fixedly watching Ayato’s movement, but as Ayato gradually reduced the interval, it suddenly swung down the sword in its right hand.

Ayato ward off its blow, and then dodged the thrust of its left hand by minimum movement as he twisted his body.

With that momentum, Ayato slipped into BaiQin’s bust and—

“Amagiri Bright Dragon Style, Dual Sword Intermediate Technique — “Hell Spider”!”

Right Kasaya, left sweep, rotated his body and right thrust, left Kasaya, right sweep, then rotated his body again and left thrust, right thrust after a large step — he drove in a total of seven consecutive blows all exactly at the same point, the place where there was the trace of Irene’s fist.³³

³³ Kasaya, I left it as is without translating, don’t know how to 袈裟 translate it in English.
dragon1412’s note: seems like it’s actually refer to a certain movement that’s traced after the monks stole, basically he circle from his shoulder down to strike – dragon1412

“——”

This time, there was a proper response.

The last thrust pierced the torso and, at the same time that he pulled the blade, BaiQin weakly fell down on his back.

『Ooh, finally one guardian has been knocked down by player Amagiri... wait, h-huh? How surprising, this time, even player Amagiri has left the stage! What on earth is happening, even I've no idea at all!』

While Eishiro's half-desperate voice resounded, Ayato hurriedly went after Sylvia.

“Jeez, I ended up being charmed, eh.”

While taking on HeiFu's attacks by himself, Ernest, who was left behind, fell in admiration to Ayato's sword skill which sank BaiQin.

Speaking only of sword skill, Toudou Kirin, who was similarly in Seidoukan, would be above Ayato.

Moreover, speaking of range of close combat, World Dragon's <Hagun Star> — just if we excluded XingLu, that is — was probably the strongest.

However, Amagiri Ayato's sword had a brightness that those two's swords did not have. It was the splendor that only those, who have controlled their own inner dread with their ideal and will had.

Ernest who was dodging HeiFu's attacks could not stop smiling broadly.

“—Now then, even though everyone showed up their skill, it'll be unfair to be the only one left out, I guess.”

Saying that, Ernest lightly blocked with one hand the spear which HeiFu swung downward.

One could understand that HeiFu put strength into it, but Ernest's arm did not move an inch.

“Lately, my skill has become dull since I rely too much on <Lei-Glems>. I guess remembering the old days a little isn’t that bad.”

When Ernest flipped the spear as is, he lightly laughed while looking downward.

*

There was no doubt.

She did by no means see wrong.

—That was her.

Sylvia was running the corridor of the Sirius Dome.

Because the access to the corridor which connected to the special watching room was prohibited to the general audience, there was no one who called out to Sylvia.

When she turned at the last corner leading there, a silhouette of a person could be seen ahead of the passage.

“Ursula!”

Sylvia called that name.

But, that silhouette went ahead through the passage without stopping.

“Wait! Ursula!”

She rushed up near and called once again.

Then, the silhouette finally stopped and slowly turned around.

Her face was half covered with the hood that she put over her eyes, but even that alone was enough to see her face.

There was no way that Sylvia would forget.

“As expected, you’re Ursula.....”

Sylvia revealed a smile while restraining the thing which almost overflowed within her.

—But.

“Who are you?”

“Eh.....?”

Her smile froze at these words.

“Ur, sula.....?”

Both her voice and her features without doubt belonged to the woman that Sylvia knew.

However, Sylvia noticed there, too.

It was the same, but it was different. Something was definitely different.

“I see..... you’re someone related to this body, huh.”

To her way of speaking which made one shiver, Sylvia’s body unconsciously drew back.

“You..... who are you?”

“There’s no need to give my name.”

The wind suddenly blew and a black light swelled up from inside the hood.

The hood rolled down and her face became exposed.

That was definitely Ursula Svento’s, but the eyes were empty and reflected nothing. Instead, the design of the necklace hung on the neck increased black brightness as if glaring at Sylvia.

“W-What.....!?”

Immediately after, an intense headache assailed Sylvia.

To the strong pain to the extent that she almost lost consciousness, Sylvia got down on her knees as she was unable to stay on her feet.

One could understand that something disgusting went into her head and was searching about for something as it pleased.

“.....I will have to erase your memory.”

(Don't tell me...?! An ability of the mind operation system.....!?)

“You'll be broken if you resist carelessly. Well, not that I care though.”

“Uh, aaaaah.....!”

An ability of the mind operation system should hardly have any effect on a normal <Starpulse Generation>. Moreover, Ursula, that Sylvia knew, was not a Strega.

(Then, what on earth is this power—?)

“Kuh.....!”

As Sylvia mustered her strength, she leaped back and escaped from that black brightness.

With that alone, her body became quite at ease.

It seemed that the effective range of that power was quite short.

“You're quite stubborn. It looks like you've a large amount of prana.”

“.....I'll ask once again. Who are you?”

Even though Sylvia was glaring at her, the other party was not daunted at all.

“What will you do when hearing it?”

“That's.....”

“You already know that it won’t be the answer that you want, right? Despite that, why do you expressly ask?”

To these indifferent words, Sylvia strongly clenched her fist.

“Well whatever. I too learned that human beings are like that. Though I think it’s foolish.”

Saying so, she slowly shortened the distance.

While Sylvia gradually drew back, she took the lux from her waist — or should one say that she hesitated for an instant.

If I were to injure Ursula.

That thought slightly delayed Sylvia’s decision.

“How naïve.”

“.....!”

The next moment, the black brightness once again attacked Sylvia.

“Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!”

“I won’t let you get away this time.”

A pain, which could not be compared with that of a little while ago, ran throughout her head.

She could not even think properly anymore.

“—This, huh.”

It looked like she found out something important for Sylvia.

At this rate, she will steal it.

No good. Only that, I can’t allow it.

Someone. Anyone is fine.

“Help, me.....!”

Tears overflowed from her eyes, and just before they spilled over and fell—

“Sylvie!”

As a voice which called Sylvia’s name could be heard, the black light was cleared away in an instant.

“—He cut off my power.....?”

Unrest ran on the woman’s voice for the first time.

On the other hand, Sylvia was released from the pain and perhaps from the relief of having being able keep what was precious to her, her body lost strength at a stretch.

Her consciousness receded, but as she was about to fall down she was gently held.

“Are you all right, Sylvie?”

“Eh.....?”

When she opened her eyes, there was Ayato’s face immediately before her eyes looking at her worriedly.

Even she heard her own heart greatly pounding.

“Y-Yes..... Thank you, Ayato-kun.....”

Sylvia averted her gaze as she was unable to look straight at his face for some reason.

“So, on earth what kind of situation is this?”

While holding Sylvia as to protect her, Ayato warily set up <Ser-Versta> with one hand.

“I see, <Ser-Versta>, huh. But—”

Along with these words, the black light was released once again.

Sylvia unintentionally stiffened, but a pain like a while ago did not assailed her.

Instead.

“Wha.....!”

The black light coiled itself around the Ulm mana dite of <Ser-Versta> that Ayato held and swallowed its red brightness. It looked as if the black light was eating the red light.

As the red brightness weakened, the pure white blade’s outline became dim and it scattered and melted before long as it could not maintain its form.

(Did she do mind interference.....? Against an ogre lux?)

“As expected of the famed ogre lux. It is quite tenacious, but with this it won’t wake up for a while.”

Ayato looked at <Ser-Versta> which became just a handle with a dumbfounded face, but he immediately transformed it and returned it to its activation form.

“.....I don’t know who you’re, but I guess today is truly a day when I meet with people outside of the norm, huh.”

And although slightly exuding sweat, he cracked such a joke and activated the blade type lux.

“Hou, so you don’t pull back. That’s quite the fighting spirit. I understand why <Ser-Versta> did choose you.”

The black light shone three times brighter.

Ayato still did not falter and seemed to look for an opening of the opponent, but—

"Jeez, that Ayato..... suddenly jumping out of the stage; I wonder what happened."

".....I'm also concerned about that idol that went out before him. I have a very bad feeling about this."

"U-Um, but, somewhat he looked very serious, so maybe something happened....."

The presence of several people from the passage behind could be felt heading this way.

".....Tch."

Then, the black light instantly swelled up and this time the whole area was covered in darkness.

"Wha.....!?"

Darkness with not even a trace of light completely stole Sylvia and Ayato's visibility and they could not even feel a presence.

"I shall warn you, girl. Never intend to get involved with me again."

"——"

To the voice which resounded within that darkness, Sylvia strongly bit her lips.

Before long, the darkness gradually faded as it got blurry; but when they recovered their vision, the hood figure was nowhere to be found.

".....Did she get away?"

".....Looks like it."

"I see — that's relief."

When Ayato said so, he leaned his back on the wall and sank down to the floor, still holding Sylvia in his arms.

“Hahaha..... The truth is that I was already quite at my limit.”

At the same time, a vast amount of mana wriggled around Ayato and several magic squares appeared simultaneously.

“Is this by any chance the said seal.....?”

Sylvia remembered the rumor regarding Ayato that became the hot topic during the <Phoenix>.

According to it a seal, which was placed on Amagiri Ayato, could only allow him to go all out for a certain amount of time.

However from the fact that players of World Dragon failed to defeat him within the time limit, although they aimed for that, it was said that that weakness has already been overcome, but.....

“W-Well, yes.....! A match aside, as expected when it comes to such an event..... Guuuuuh!”

When chains of light which appeared from the magic squares bound Ayato, he leaked a particularly painful and anguish voice.

“A-Are you all right, Ayato-kun?”

“A-Ah, yes..... I’m all right. Even though it looks like this, the pain became quite lighter than before.....”

Although Ayato tried laughing stoutheartedly, still his whole body was drenched with sweat.

“Was that mana reaction just now possibly.....!?”

“—Ah, Ayato-senpai!”

While hearing sounds of someone rushing with light steps from behind before long, Sylvia really heaved a sigh of relief this time for sure.

*

On the airship, everything, from the hull, air sacs to the propeller was painted black.

That, which only flew a few times a year in moonless nights, was registered under the name of a certain millionaire as its owner; but its actual owner was Le Wolfe Student Council President Dirk Eberwein

The time was already revolving around midnight and the airship for tourists so as to enjoy the night view has already finished its business/operations.

“—So, we’re meeting each other again after a long time, is it another report of trouble?”

Dirk who leaned on the sofa in the cabin spat out.

“You’re free to go kill yourself on your own, but it’s very meddlesome for me who has to deal with the mess. Do you understand, Varda?”

The woman — Varda who sat across a round table in front of Dirk shook her head to his words.

“It is not my fault. It is Madiath who provided this body. If you have any complaints, say them to Madiath.”

Then, Madiath Mesa who was sitting right to Varda exaggeratedly shrugged his shoulders.

“From the prior investigation, it was found that she has no relatives. Even after coming to Asterisk, she had no friend whom she was close to in particular. Therefore if there is to be a possibility, she might have had some kind of relations before coming to Asterisk.”

“And of all people, it had to be the world diva, huh? Haa, what a joke-like thing.”

Dirk gulped down his already empty glass and crunched the ice as if to vent his irritation.

“In the first place, you should at least recognize Sylvia’s face. Just how ignorant of the world are you?”

“I have no interest in that. Besides, it is hard for me to distinguish the specimen called human.”

At her way of speaking as if it had nothing to do with her at all, Dirk’s irritation increased further.

Even if he understood that she was such an existence, Dirk did not like Varda after all.

In fact, there was nothing existing in this world that Dirk liked.

“Now, now, fortunately it doesn’t look like it’ll become that serious a matter, isn’t it good? She has no clue how to trace back to Varda. There won’t be any problem even if we leave it as is.”

“I do not particularly have any attachment to this body though.”

“.....Give me a break. Humans who can reveal high compatibility rating with you are precious. It isn’t something that can be provided so easily.”

Madiath said as he was really troubled.

“Can you reach back into her memory?”

“It isn’t like I can, but I must come in contact with this body’s consciousness. In that case, if I make a mistake, it might cause her to never awaken again. I want to avoid that risk if possible”

“Hmph, that’s inconvenient.”

Then as to cut this topic there, Madiath clapped his hands.

“Come on, more importantly all the members of the Golden Bough Alliance have gathered after a long time. So, let’s have a little more meaningful talk.”

“.....Well that’s fine. Though I said it many times, but stop with that shitty name. It makes me feel sick. In the first place, it’s just a relation where we lend our power only for the sake of the plan. It isn’t something grandiose as an alliance.”

“You are cold as usual. I find this naming unexpectedly to my liking though.”

“—So, how does the plan progress?”

Ignoring Dirk and Madiath’s conversation, Varda went right to the point.

“I can say that it’s going relatively well so far. At least, the groundwork in various places is progressing fairly.”

“As usual, we can do nothing about the labor shortage.”

“Isn’t it precisely why you asked me to bring in Fan XingLu?”

To Varda’s words, Dirk breathed a sigh full of discomfort.

“What, are you bringing up that talk again? As a result, your identity has almost been exposed.”

“The issue isn’t that, but the matter of labor shortage. Fan XingLu is an extremely valuable talented person, so she is worth taking suitable risk.”

“Well actually, if that old person comes to our side, it will certainly be reliable. Honestly, I have no confidence to keep her in check. If she says that she won’t be hostile, then that alone is satisfactory.”

“I agree. If we were to carelessly bring her in, she would just throw things into confusion anyway. There is no idiot who would expressly poke a thicket knowing that a snake would come out.”

“Two against one, huh. It can’t be helped.”

Like that, Varda finally backed up. She followed the logic of the majority.

“Well, speaking of manpower, at worst if Miss Orphelia is there, it’s good enough. Conversely speaking, even if all the members of the Golden Bough Alliance were to disappear, she is the only piece that we can’t afford to lose.”

“.....Like I said, don’t use that shitty name.”

“Then, won’t there be any problem if we expedite the execution itself of the plan?”

Varda’s suggestion was reasonable, but Madiath slowly shook his head.

“It’s regrettable, but it’s necessary to properly prepare the stage. This is half like a ritual after all. Besides, even you would wish for greater results anyway, right?”

“.....I agree with the latter.”

Regarding this matter, Dirk was fine with either. If they were to expedite it, troubles would decrease; and if they were to properly proceed with the preparations, the fun would increase.

“Now then, also regarding the guard captain——”

“Before that, can you ask one thing?”

“Hmm? What is it, Dirk?”

“Madiath why did you remain silent about Amagiri Haruka? I thought that you properly took care of it. It’s indeed surprising that you tossed her into a hospital.”

“Hahaha, no way. I’m amazed to hear you say that when you should have already suspected to some extent as well.”

Madiath scenically laughed as he said so.

“I can’t afford to dispose of her. Even you understand that, right?”

“Isn’t it simply just for your convenience?”

"Indeed. That's why it has nothing to do with you."

Dirk clicked his tongue and carved deep wrinkles on his forehead.

"I got it. Then, I'll ask one more thing."

"Sure, feel free."

"Sorry to bring this up again, but it seems that Amagiri Ayato was also involved with the matter of Varda this time."

".....What of it?"

Madiath's eyes suddenly narrowed.

"That guy is dangerous after all. It'd better to crush him quickly."

"It's just a coincidence that he was involved this time."

"Coincidence or whatever, that guy and <Ser-Versta> will most likely become an obstacle to the plan. Definitely."

It was something like some kind of intuition.

"Good grief. I see that you dislike him very much."

"And I, too, see that you're protecting him very much."

For a moment, Dirk and Madiath's gazes collided with one another.

".....Haa."

Madiath was the first to avert his eyes.

"He is greatly enlivening the current <Festa>. In fact, last year's <Phoenix> was a great success rarely seen in the recent years. That also works as a plus for the plan. Am I wrong?"

"Tch.....!"

When he was struck there, Dirk could no longer retort.

“Besides, he..... or rather, his team should hype up the next <Gryps> in various ways.”

“Hmm? Did you come across something?”

“Well, I wonder.”

As Madiath said so while putting on airs, he twisted his mouth and laughed.

“I would say it will depend on the young lady Enfield. I, too, am expecting something by all means.”

Epilogue

“Phew.....”

When Sylvia stopped the shower, she deeply exhaled while smoothing up her wet hair.

Like this, she came back to her room, washed off her sweat and finally felt relieved.

Even so, it was not like she has already sorted out what happened today.

But, at least the fact that Ursula was here in Asterisk was certain.

Even if she has become an existence that Sylvia did not know.

“.....It’s fine, I no longer have to be in a hurry; so I’ll carefully ascertain what happened to you.”

Sylvia slightly laughed as she talked so to herself.

Right. Sylvia Lyyneheym was bad at giving up.

Then, as she took her bath towel and was about to go out of the bathroom, her portable terminal informed her of a call.

The other party was—

“Ayato-kun.....?”

After thinking a little, Sylvia opened a space window.

『Sylvie? Sorry to call you this late at— w-wait, what are you wearing?!』

“Ah, I was taking a shower, that’s why.”

『In that case, you didn’t have to come out immediately! Or rather, shouldn’t you have changed it to a voice communication?!』

While averting his eyes on the other side of the space window, Ayato turned away.

“Hahaha, I don’t really lose anything, so it’s fine. Besides, I properly wind a bath towel.”

『That’s not the problem!』

Ayato whose face turned red was somehow lovely, so Sylvia’s shoulders shook as she chuckled.

He looked like a different person entirely when he came to help her.

“So, what’s the matter?”

As she asked so after laughing for a while, Ayato opened his mouth while still averting his eyes bashfully.

『.....Hmm, no, I just wondered whether you were all right after what happened today.』

“So, you were worried about me. Yes, thank you.”

In the end, after Ursula left, Ayato's teammates came and then Ayato and Sylvia parted there. If they were together as is then, she would have had to explain in various ways.

As it seemed to roll up Sylvia's circumstances, she did not feel that inclined to explain.

"Which reminds me, I saw in the news; but I heard that after I retired, you defeated one of those guardians, Ayato-kun. You're really amazing!"

Therefore, she avoided that topic as much as possible.

『Ah, yes. But, it isn't such a big deal. Rather if you watched the video, Fairclough-san was more amazing after I retired.』

"Ah, that's for sure. Even I was kind of surprised a little."

By himself, Ernest settled the fight with HeiFu which was finally left; but his sword skill was amazing to a degree that even Sylvia had never saw.

"Well, that event was fun in its own way and I also fully enjoyed our date, so it was a meaningful school festival, I guess. This was also thanks to you, Ayato-kun. Thank you."

『That's good, but.....』

"That's right. When I get another days off next time, then....."

『Sylvie』

But as Ayato interrupted such words of Sylvia and turned straight around her way, he said in a serious tone.

『—That person is the master that Sylvie was looking for, right?』

It was a straight ball that ignored all efforts of Sylvia who somehow tried to avoid that topic.

(Well, I should just say as expected of Ayato-kun.....)

Sylvia smiled wryly and gave a small nod as she gave up.

“Haa..... That’s right. Ursula Svento, the person who taught me how to sing.”

『Then, why on earth.....』

Though Ayato spoke ambiguously, it was transmitted well enough with that alone.

“I don’t know, but she looked like a different person entirely. She didn’t seem to remember me, either.....”

『Not remembering you?』

“Yes. Besides, Ursula did not that strange power... I think. Or it might be that I didn’t just know.”

The biggest concern was the words 『related to this body』 that Ursula said.

If she were to take the meaning literally, it would meant that the body was Ursula’s, but the content was a different person. That was clearly beyond a level of ability that <Strega> and <Dante> possessed.

If there was a power capable of such a thing, then it would be—

『Sylvie?』

Then probably because Sylvia has sunk into silence, Ayato called out to her anxiously.

“Ah, sorry. Anyway, I intend to investigate about that area next time, too.”

『.....』

But when Sylvia said so, this time Ayato fell silent with a serious expression.

And after a while, he spoke quite carefully.

『.....Sylvia's master became like this, but at least, currently that person is dangerous. I'm not talking about that strange power..... I can't explain it well, but it's about a more fundamental part.』

"Yes, I know."

『Haa — well, of course you do.』

When Sylvia replied immediately, Ayato took a heavy breath as if she knew her answer.

『Then, I'll help you at least. When you'll make a move, call out to me and together.....』

"I'm thankful for the proposal, but no."

Sylvia said so without hearing Ayato's words until the end.

『.....Why?』

"Ayato-kun, you guys will participate in the <Gryps>, right? In that case, you must focus on it."

Ayato had things that he should do.

Sylvia could not let him spend his precious time for her sake.

However Ayato, still facing sideways, laughed with a smirk.

『It's natural to help a person in trouble; didn't you say it?』

These are the words that Sylvia said to Ayato before.

"B-But..... I should have said that 『only if it was within the range where my hands can reach』 at the end, right?"

『It's all right. If it's until where Sylvie is, my hands can reach there.』

"——"

At his words, Sylvia was at a loss for words for an instant.

“Haa..... And you just say such a thing plainly, eh.”

『Eh?』

“No, it’s nothing.”

When Sylvia lightly shook her head, after taking a small deep breath she fixedly stared at Ayato’s eyes.

“I understand. Then if Ayato-kun’s hands are free at the time when I move, can you lend them to me?”

『Of course』

“—Hmm, thank you.”

And then after having had idle chat for a little longer, Sylvia closed the space window.

“Sigh, good grief.....!”

And after having let a loud voice resound in the bathroom only a little, Sylvia pushed her forehead as she leaned it on the wall—

“How troublesome, now I’ve seriously fallen for you.....”

She muttered so in a low voice that she herself did not hear, either.